



Feeding Bodies. Fueling Minds.™

2026 Position Paper

Preserve the Integrity of Minnesota's Free School Meals Program

As the dedicated professionals planning, preparing and serving healthy free meals to nourish students, MSNA requests state and school district officials continue working in partnership with each other and nutrition professionals to ensure quality school meal experiences are available to all Minnesota students. As expected, many positive outcomes have been achieved through Minnesota's Free School Meals Program. To continue the program's success, MSNA shares the following requests:

Prohibit further expansion of allowable uses of the Nutrition Account (Fund 2):

Legislation passed in 2024 and 2025 provides flexibility for school districts to use surpluses in the nutrition account for costs directly associated with providing school meals, including cafeteria chairs, tables and other cafeteria related capital needs. Further expanding allowable uses negatively impacts the ability for the nutrition account to cover meal plan improvements and kitchen labor costs, all of which are experiencing inflationary pressures.

Clarify and amend state law on required sales of second meals:

A current law requiring the availability of a second reimbursable meal for sale should be clarified to address the availability of a second entrée only; and amended to require a second entrée only when schools can account for needs of all students over multiple meal services each day.

Avoid state-imposed meal pattern mandates:

School meals are already heavily regulated by USDA to ensure healthy, balanced meals are available to all MN students. Imposing state nutrition standards would add complexity and cost, threatening financial feasibility of school meal programs and further burdening K-12 industry partners as they work to develop menu items to meet new and impending federal requirements.

Require a 15-minute minimum for individual student seat time in the cafeteria:

Students and families consistently report that allotted time for lunch is insufficient to comfortably consume meals. Adequate nutrition and social breaks support students' physical and mental well-being, contributing significantly to overall academic performance. With consideration for schools' unique operational and service factors, allotting ample time once a student is seated with their meal is crucial to maximize nutritional benefits for students and lessen the amount of uneaten food being thrown away.

Contacts:

Glen Ritter, MSNA President / Food Service Director of St. Michael-Albertville Schools, #885

Darcy Stueber, MSNA Public Policy Chair / Director of Nutrition Services of Mankato Area Schools

Sam Walseth, MSNA Lobbyist, Capitol Hill Associates

About the Minnesota School Nutrition Association

The Minnesota School Nutrition Association (MSNA), founded in 1956 as a state-wide association with local chapters, is a non-profit association of over 2,500 members who work to ensure that all children have access to healthy meals and nutrition education in Minnesota. For more information about MSNA and upcoming events, please visit www.mnsna.org.