

August 2023

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We can't wait to welcome students back to the cafeteria for the 2023-2024 school year! To kick off the new year, we wanted to share a few things you and your child can look forward to when it comes to mealtime, information on meal pricing and steps to apply for free and reduced-price meals, how we manage food allergies and the documentation needed, and an inside look at the new recipes, concepts, and programs we'll be introducing this fall.

Food Kids Love to Eat

Chartwells' team of chefs and dietitians are working to bring even more variety to our menus featuring new recipes with kid-approved foods. This year we're serving up:

- **Veg Out!** - A recipe concept focused on bringing fruit and veggie-based options to the center of the plate!
- **Acai Bowls!** - Acai is an excellent source of many vitamins and minerals.
- **Onigiri Wraps!** - Japanese rice balls made of steamed rice that are compressed into triangular or round shapes
- **And LOTS more!**

The value of school lunch is top of mind as families continue to experience inflation and growing food costs at home. In addition to giving kids the chance to try new foods and cut back on food waste, school lunch provides students with healthy, balanced, and safe meals at an affordable price, while saving families time and stress.

Meal Cost and Free and Reduced-Price Meal Applications

Free or Reduced-Price Meals are available again this year to students who qualify for these benefits, but all students, regardless of family situations, are encouraged to dine in the cafeteria together.

We encourage all families, regardless of income, to complete and submit a short, confidential school meal application prior to the start of the school year to ensure that there are no gaps in meal benefits for students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals. Parents or guardians can submit this application in person at your child's school office. It's an easy and confidential way to ensure your child stays well-nourished at school.

Food Allergies and Special Dietary Needs

We recognize the critical importance of our approach to supporting students and families who manage food allergy issues every day and work closely with the families of students who have food allergies and medical conditions that require a modification to their menu. Our approach involves coordination between parents and guardians, school nurses, school administrators, and food service professionals in the school's/district's food allergy and medical conditions protocol.

If you would like your child to receive meal accommodations for food allergies or a medical condition impacting the diet, please ensure that you submit the required documentation to your child's school nurse and that you receive confirmation from our Dining Director that documentation has been received and a modification plan is in place.

In order to modify the school meal, we must have a written Medical Statement on file signed by a licensed medical provider (physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner). The statement must identify the following:

- Information about the child's impairment that is sufficient for understanding how it restricts the child's diet,
- An explanation of what must be done to accommodate the child's disability, and
- If appropriate, the food(s) to be omitted, texture modifications, and recommended substitutions.

For any children who are currently receiving meal accommodations, please Ben Leahey at bleahey@westportps.org to review the meal accommodation plan, which may require additions or amendments based on the ongoing supply chain issues.

As part of our protocol, café managers review food labels for foods used to produce special meals daily. We may encounter situations where product substitutions are made that contain different allergens or have a different nutritional profile than our usual menu items. As a result, we may need to provide a meal that is different than previously identified for students with special dietary needs to ensure that the meal served to them remains in adherence to their needs as outlined in their medical forms.

While we have posted signs in the cafeteria encouraging students with food allergies or other dietary concerns to speak up, we encourage you to remind your child to be sure to check with the cafeteria manager regarding product substitutions that may not be reflected in the posted menu. We will make every attempt to update Nutrislice in real-time, but please do not solely rely on nutrition or allergen information on Nutrislice to accommodate allergies or medical conditions in the event of last-minute menu changes.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your student's allergies or dietary needs, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. We are committed to providing safe meals for all students!

Programs that Encourage Fun and Discovery

Chartwells continues to inspire healthy eating habits and spark a culinary curiosity to last a lifetime through fun and engaging programs, including:

- **Global Eats:** Highlighting the unique ingredients and authentic flavors from cuisines around the world, Global Eats brings a world of flavors to the cafeteria. Our newest signature program takes students on a food exploration that celebrates cultural heritages, traveling through China, India, Italy, Mexico, and more.
- **Discovery Kitchen:** Designed to make nutrition education fun and entertaining, Chartwells chefs and dietitians have worked together to create curriculums that get kids cooking, trying new foods, and learning about what they're eating. Each month has a different theme and activities will be adapted for the current meal programs.
- **Mood Boost:** This innovative program helps elementary and middle school students connect what they eat with how they feel. It features recipes and characters that focus on six moods: Smart, Happy, Confident, Alert, Strong and Calm.

- **Student Choice:** Giving middle and high school students a voice in deciding what food concepts are featured and new menu items that will be available, Student Choice brings the latest food trends to school menus.

Menus and Nutrition Facts at Your Fingertips

Through Nutrislice, an innovative app, students, parents and faculty have access to school menus, including nutrition information, allergens and photos. Nutrislice can be downloaded for free from the App store (iOS) or Google Play (Android) and is available on desktop and mobile devices. Menus are also available at www.westportps.org/departments/food-services.

Celebrating Our School Lunch Heroes

As kids advance from grade to grade with new classes and different teachers, the dedicated lunch ladies and men in the school cafeteria are often one of the few constants throughout the academic journey. Throughout the school year, these heroes of the cafeteria are dedicated to making mealtime a bright spot in a student's day, ensuring kids throughout the Westport community are served nourishing meals.

We are always looking for talented individuals to join the dining services team with perks including, family friendly schedules, no night or weekend work, hiring incentives, and more. For more information, visit www.altogethergreat.com and search for jobs in Westport!

Through sharing our passion for great tasting food, instilling a desire for food discovery, and most importantly, providing nourishing meals, we're excited to continue serving up happy and healthy to your children in the year ahead.

We love hearing from parents, and your feedback is important to us. Please reach out to our team with any questions or comments. We're looking forward to a great school year!

All the best,

Ben Leahey
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