Policy Memo: K-12 Meal Patterns and Share Table Guidance

To: K-12 Students, Parents, Guardians, and School Staff

From: School District Nutrition Services

Subject: Maximizing Nutrition and Eliminating Food Waste in Our Cafeterias

Our school district is committed to providing healthy, well-balanced breakfasts and lunches that fuel academic success for students from Kindergarten through 12th grade. To provide flexibility, reduce waste, and build positive eating habits, our cafeterias operate under federal nutrition specifications and promote student-led conservation practices like Offer Versus Serve (OVS) and Share Tables.

1. K-12 Meal Pattern Requirements

- **Milk Choices**: Unlike preschool patterns, cafeterias serving K-12 students must offer at least two different options of fluid milk daily (such as low-fat and fat-free). Students may select flavored low-fat or fat-free milk, which is capped at 10 grams or less of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces as of July 1, 2025.
- **Whole Grain-Rich Standards**: At least 80% of all grain items offered over the course of a week must be whole grain-rich.
- **Grain-Based Dessert Limits**: K-5 students are allowed to count up to 2 ounce equivalents of grain-based desserts per week toward their total grain requirement. Sweet crackers (like graham or animal crackers) count toward this weekly dessert limit for older grades.
- **Vegetables and Fruits**: Students are provided robust daily portions, including strict weekly requirements for various vegetable subgroups (Dark Green, Red/Orange, Beans/Peas/Lentils, Starchy, and Other). Unlike preschool rules, a second vegetable cannot be substituted in place of fruit during lunch.
- **Dietary Limits**: Menus strictly regulate weekly limits for calories, saturated fat (less than 10% of total calories), and sodium. Added sugars across all meals must be limited to less than 10% of total weekly calories by July 1, 2027.

2. Offer Versus Serve (OVS) Efficiency

- **How It Works**: OVS is a meal service option designed to minimize food waste by letting students decline components they do not intend to eat.
- **The Golden Rule of OVS**: While students are offered a full, compliant meal, they have the freedom to turn down certain items—provided that they select **at least a 1/2 cup** of vegetables, fruits, or a combination of both to create a valid, reimbursable meal.

3. Utilizing the School "Share Table"

Even with OVS, sometimes students take an item they decide they don't want. To prevent perfectly good food from being tossed into the garbage, every cafeteria operates a designated **Share Table**. Students are invited to leave unconsumed items here so their peers can take additional helpings at no extra cost.

To participate, students must understand what is allowable:

🛑 Share Table Rules at a Glance

* **YES — Drop it off if it is:** Unopened, pre-packaged, shelf-stable items (granola bars, cereal packs, crackers, condiment packets) ; wrapped fruits or fruits with a thick skin intact (bananas, oranges, washed apples) ; or unopened milk and string cheese *if* placed directly into a temperature-controlled display cooler or refrigerator.
* **NO — Keep it or bin it if it is:** Unpackaged items (like an unlidded salad bowl) ; packaged items that have been opened or unsealed (like an open bag of baby carrots) ; items that can be opened and easily resealed ; or any food item brought from home.

- **Monitoring and Redistribution**: Staff closely monitor the table to ensure everything is untampered with, clean, and well within expiration dates. Leftover items that are safely preserved may be re-served at future meals, donated to local non-profit organizations like food banks, or managed with the help of student "share table helpers" who promote safety and recycling. Adults are not permitted to consume items left on the table.