

Share Table Guidance for Schools

Setting up a shared table at MCPS schools:

Work with your Principal, Green Team leader, school staff and volunteers to develop a plan to start a program.

- Choose a designated location in your cafeteria to collect unopened and/or unconsumed food. The ideal location of the table is close to your recycling and trash sorting station. This helps students learn about the importance of not wasting food and how to recycle by sorting items correctly.
- Students should be encouraged to place unopened/unconsumed food on the share table and/or take food from it.
- Display signage outlining share table guidelines.
- Invite students to be "share table helpers," and train them about the importance of food safety, recovery, and recycling.

Acceptable Food

- Unopened, pre-packaged, shelf-stable items such as cereal packs, oatmeal bars.
- Packaged or unpackaged fruits and vegetables, oranges and apples if the peel is intact.

Unacceptable Food

- Unpackaged food items.
- Packaged items that have been opened and/or partly consumed.
- Any homemade food.

Requirements:

- Contact the Division of Sustainability and Compliance for an assessment and guidance before starting the program.
- Staff must monitor the share table to ensure all items placed on it are allowed, the packaging is intact, untampered, and clean, and the expiration dates have not yet passed.
- Sharable items must be stored appropriately and should be placed on the share table before the next meal.
- Adults may not consume items left on the table until all student lunch periods have concluded.

Options for Perishable food:

- Unopened, pre-packaged, perishable food items (such as string cheese and milk; if these items are immediately stored in a temperature-controlled storage unit, such as a refrigerator or mechanical cooler, and the temperature is maintained at 41°F or colder, it may be served or stored appropriately for later time prior to the expiration date.
- The temperature-controlled storage unit must be temperature checked at the beginning of the first lunch period and recorded to confirm the temperature is 41 °F before adding food.
- If a temperature-controlled storage unit is not available, students may take the unopened items within 2 hours of being placed on the table. Items must be discarded after 2 hours if this option is utilized.
- If it is determined that the food cannot be placed on the shared table, compost the food if your school has a food scraps composting program or discard them as trash.
- Items leftover may be donated to non-profit organizations, such as food banks.

Best management practice:

- After all lunch periods are over, move the leftover shared table items that do not need temperature control to a central location (like outside the cafeteria or main office), where students may select snacks for the rest of the day. The recovered food can also be used for after-school activities.
- If food is discarded, please be sure to recycle the empty containers. To see what's accepted recycling in MCPS, please click on this link: <https://tinyurl.com/bdfpz7bx>
- If the school is actively engaged in a food donation program, the refrigerated machine (cooler) should be placed where a volunteer can easily access.
- If the food is not picked up for external distribution, a designated staff member should throw away leftover items..

Any questions? Please contact the Division of Sustainability and Compliance for assistance by calling 240-314-1090 or email:

sustainability@mcpsmd.org