

Frequently Asked Questions

How can parents get involved in school meals programs?

Review cafeteria menus with your child and be encouraging about trying new items. Try new food – especially fruits and vegetables – at home and your child may be more willing to try these foods at school.

Visit the school cafeteria to make your own observations and have lunch. Please check in with your school's main office before going to the cafeteria.

Are school meals nutritious?

School meals are well-balanced, healthy meals that are required to meet science-based, federal nutrition standards.

No more than 30% of calories can come from fat, less than 10% from saturated fat

Meals must provide 1/3 of the Recommended Dietary Allowances of protein, vitamins A & C, iron and calcium

School meals are served in age appropriate portions

In Tacoma, every school lunch provides a variety of menu choices

Milk – 1% white & nonfat chocolate

Vegetables – several choices each day, often locally or regionally grown

Fruit – several choices each day, often locally or regionally grown

Grains – more whole grain items like rolls or sandwich bread and pastas

Meat or meat alternate – chicken, beef, turkey, beans, cheese, yogurt

Each student may select an unlimited amount of fruits and vegetables each day.

Are school meals safe?

School nutrition professionals care for the students they serve, and through strict food safety procedures and staff training, maintain a superior safety record while providing nutritious meals to thousands of Tacoma students each day.

Why should I encourage my children to eat school meals?

Providing students their choice of milk, fruits and vegetables, grains and proteins, are a great value and convenience for parents. School cafeterias offer students a variety of healthy choices and help children learn how to assemble a well-balanced meal. Federal regulations require that meals be served in age –appropriate portions.

Don't school meals contain processed foods?

What have come to be known as “processed foods” are increasingly prepared with healthier ingredients, as well as less fat and sugar.

Pizzas are increasingly made with whole grain crusts, low-sodium sauce and reduced fat cheese.

Chicken nuggets and patties regularly use whole grain breading and are baked rather than fried.

French fries are often without trans fat.

My child's school has vending machines – are the foods sold in these machines subject to the same regulations as school meals?

All school meals are required to meet federal nutrition standards, but other foods that are served in school through vending machines, fundraisers, class parties, etc., are not required to meet federal nutrition standards. These items are increasingly being subject to local and state laws that require nutrition standards. In Tacoma, these items are regulated through our district's school board approved Nutrition and Wellness Policy #R6700.

What are the beverage options with school meals?

In Tacoma 1% white milk and non-fat chocolate milk are offered with each meal. School meals offer flavored milk as an option because experts agree that to ensure intake of calcium, vitamin D, protein and other nutrients important for growth and development, it is better for children and adolescents to drink flavored milk than to avoid milk altogether.

How are school nutrition programs working to make healthy meals kid-friendly?

Children can be picky eaters, but school nutrition managers are always working to find new healthy recipes that children are willing to eat. Schools and the foodservice industry are making student favorites more healthy, such as serving pizza on whole grain bread with low-sodium sauce and low-fat cheese. School nutrition programs also work to meet the needs of their diverse student population.

Do all students have access to school meal programs?

All children in Tacoma may purchase meals, meeting federal nutrition standards, but families at or below 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free or reduced price meals. Families may complete applications for the free and reduced price program at any time during the school year. The applications are available from your child's school office or the Nutrition Services department.