

August 2024

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We can't wait to welcome students back to the cafeteria for the 2024-25 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 meal benefits, how we manage food allergies and the documentation needed, and an inside look at the concepts and programs we'll be running 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. 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 Prices/Michigan Free Meals 2024-25

For the 2024-25 academic school year, we are excited to announce that the Governor's State School Aid Budget passed and will allow Sparta Area School Students Pre-K through 12th grade to receive **One Free Reimbursable Breakfast and Lunch Daily**. Students will still have the option **to purchase** milk only (\$0.60), second entrees, and a la carte items. However, these options will be charged to the students' meal accounts when funds are available or will need to be paid for with cash.

School Breakfast and Lunch Information

Breakfast will be available daily at all school buildings as follows;

Sparta High School (pick up in café and bring to 1st class) 7:40-7:50 am

Sparta Middle School (in the café) 7:30-7:50 am

Applevue Elementary (in the classroom) 8:25-8:55 am

Ridgeview Elementary (in the classroom) 8:40-9:10 am

SECC (in the classroom) 8:30-9:30 am

Lunch will be available daily as follows;

Sparta High School

KCTC LUNCH 11:00-11:15 AM

1ST LUNCH 11:15-11:45 AM

2ND LUNCH 12:10-12:40 PM

3RD LUNCH 1:00-1:30 PM

Sparta Middle School

1st Lunch 11:20-11:50 am

2nd Lunch 11:53-12:23 pm

3rd Lunch 12:26-12:56 pm

Applevue Elementary

3rd Grade 11:20-11:45 am

4th Grade 11:50-12:10 pm

5th Grade 12:15-12:35 pm

Ridgeview Elementary

KDG 10:50-11:25 am

DK 11:20-11:45 am

1st Grade 11:35-12:00 pm

2nd Grade 12:10-12:35 pm

SECC

Lunch 11:45-12:50 pm

Education Benefit Forms Only

All Families that have children attending Sparta Area School will be encouraged to complete the Education Benefit Form. Sparta Area Schools is now a CEP district and does not need to complete the free and reduced application. However, the Education Benefit Form is VERY IMPORTANT TO THE FUNDING OF OUR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND THE RESOURCES WE PROVIDE TO STUDENTS. We only need one Education Benefit form per household. If you have already completed the free and reduced application or Education Benefit form as of July 1, 2024 or are directly certified from the state, we do not need you to complete another form. Why do we need to fill one of these forms out if everyone is free? Completing these forms take around 5 minutes and can help students receive important resources. The Education Benefit Forms may help provide; Health and Wellness Services, Before and After School Academic & Enrichment Programs, Guidance & college counselors, EBT Benefits, Fee's waived for college applications & admissions tests, along with resources for classrooms, teachers, & children. The Education Benefit Form can be completed online at <https://sparta.familyportal.cloud/> or 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. In order for food service to make any meal accommodations we need a completed Special Diet Statement Form which can be found on the Sparta Area Schools website under the Food Service webpage in the resource section. <https://www.spartaschools.org/departments/menus/>

Once you have completed the Special Diet Statement, please email it to the Food Service Director Melissa Alley at melissa.alley@spartaschools.org. Once the document is received, the Food Service Director will contact the parent/guardian listed on the form to go over meal accommodations and the menu before it is put in place. **Please make sure you send your child to school with meals until an alternate menu is made and the parent/guardian has spoken with the Food Service Director.**

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 received meal accommodations last school year, please contact Melissa Alley at 616-887-1744 to review the meal accommodation plan, which may require additions or amendments based on the ongoing supply chain issues or medical changes. No meal accommodations will be made without communicating with the food service director first.

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 Melissa Alley. We are committed to providing safe meals for all students.

Menus, 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 <https://spartaschools.nutrislice.com/menu/>.

Payment and Meal Accounts

For your convenience, we accept payments online with check, debit, or credit card. To do so you must visit our family portal at <https://sparta.familyportal.cloud/>. In order to set your child/children up with an account you will need their student ID number. If your child does not know their ID number, please contact the Food Service Director. Once basic student information is entered, you may make a deposit for your student's food service account through a secure internet connection. If you choose to apply money online there will be convenience fees. There is a \$1.50 flat fee when using a checking account for payment and \$2.85 for every \$100.00 increment in a transaction when using a credit/debit card. Remember you can make one family deposit as well. You do not need to do each child separately. You may also send cash or checks with your child to school. Please make sure the payment is identified for food service and child/children's names are on the payment.

Food Service Charging Policy-

Sparta Area Schools does not allow food shaming in our district. If a student takes an extra entrée, they will be charged for the entrée on their school meal account. We do not take away meals. Our goal is to feed children and give them a great meal experience. Students with negative balances will not be asked to perform chores to pay for their meals. No one will be shamed or singled out. If a student already has a meal on their tray, we will not take it away or throw it away. The student's account will be charged. No students will be allowed to charge a la carte items if they carry a negative balance. Disabled and handicapped students at all grade levels will continue to receive their school meals with no interruption while their parents are being contacted for payment.

Courtesy emails and deposit requests will be sent out weekly to alert parents when meal balances fall into the negative. Food Service leads and Director will also attempt to contact parents via telephone. Staff will not communicate with students about their negative balance unless the district has unsuccessfully attempted to contact the student's parent or legal guardian first. Staff will not discuss negative balances with any students in the presence of other students. If you would like to put limits on your student's meal account, please reach out to the Food Service Director.

Sparta's Food Service Bad Debt Policy-

Bad debt is uncollectible/delinquent inactive student debt that has been determined to be uncollectible by the end of the school year in which debt was incurred. If the uncollectible/delinquent inactive debt cannot be recovered by the School Meals Program in the year when the debt was incurred, then this is classified as bad debt. Once classified as bad debt, non-federal funding sources must reimburse the NSFSA for the total amount of the bad debt. The funds may come from the district general fund, State or local funding, school or community organizations such as the PTA, or any non-federal source. Once the uncollectible/delinquent debt charges are converted to bad debt, records relating to those charges must be maintained in accordance with the record retention requirements in 7 C.F.R.210.9(b) (17) and 7 C.F.R. 210.15(b).

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, Korea, and the Caribbean.
- **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 Sparta High School and Sparta Middle 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.
- **Celebrate:** Fun Holidays and events such as National School Breakfast and Lunch Week with fun contests, activities, and prizes for all students to enjoy.

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 each student's day, ensuring kids throughout the Sparta community are served nourishing meals.

Job Opportunities

We are always looking for talented individuals to join the dining services team with perks including, family friendly schedules, no night or weekend work, and more. For more information, email Melissa Alley at melissa.alley@spartaschools.org

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!

Thank you,
Melissa Alley
Chartwells Director of Dining Services
616-887-1744
Melissa.alley@spartaschools.org