

August/September 2022

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We are thrilled to be serving your child for the 2022-2023 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 and get an inside look at the new recipes, concepts, and programs we'll be introducing this fall.

Free and Reduced-Price Meals

Thanks to nationwide waivers for federally funded meal programs, school meals were free to all students through the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, these waivers have expired, so **schools must return to charging for breakfast and lunch, except for Elementary Breakfast will still be FREE. Free or reduced-price meals are only available to students who qualify for these benefits, but all students, regardless of family situations are encouraged to dine in the cafeteria together.**

Our goal is to continue to support all students and families by ensuring those who need free meals at school continue to receive them – especially understanding that the pandemic has created new hardships for many families, including those who have never previously relied on school meals. We also understand that many households have not submitted a meal application in two years.

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 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. Remember we only need one application per household.

School Food Service Meal Options & Prices

Sparta Area Schools provides both breakfast and lunch daily.

Ridgeview/Applevue/SECC will all eat FREE BREAKFAST IN THE CLASSROOM

Elementary Lunch Price: \$2.75 Reduced Lunch Price: \$0.40

Sparta High School serves breakfast at 7:45-8 a.m. daily. Sparta Middle School serve breakfast 7:30-7:55 a.m. daily. Students are allowed to bring their breakfast to class if they don't have time before school starts to eat. **Secondary breakfast costs \$1.65 at full price or \$0.30 at reduced price.**

Secondary lunch prices-\$2.90-\$3.30 depending on the meal selected. Reduced lunch is \$0.40

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 resources section.

Once you have completed the special diet statement, please send 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 accommodation and the menu before we put it 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 are currently receiving meal accommodations, 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. No special meals/menus will be developed until the Food Service Director receives the proper documentation and is able to go over it with the parent/guardian.

As part of our protocol, café managers review food labels for foods used to produce special meals daily; however, we are facing unprecedented food supply issues and while we are doing everything we can to minimize disruptions to our program, we do expect to experience continued shortages and substitutions. Therefore, 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.

Thank You-

Sparta Area Schools would like to say a huge thank you to The Tesa Tape Plant located in Sparta for paying off all negative food accounts for the 2021-22 school year. Tesa's generous donation paid off 281 student's negative balances. Once again thank you so much for your donation and we look forward to your continued support.

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-

All Sparta Area School students are allowed to charge meals, should they forget their lunch money, up to -\$10.00 or 3 meals in succession. Once the student's negative balance exceeds this amount, the student will be placed on an alternate meal. An alternate meal will consist of a peanut butter or cheese sandwich with a fruit, veggie, and milk. The food service department will send the alternate student meal list to the appropriate teachers and principals in an effort to help contact parents/guardians and properly order student lunches discreetly. This will eliminate any surprises on the child's part and provide the parent with one more opportunity to pay the student's negative balance off. 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. Sparta Area Schools does not allow food shaming in our district. 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. If you are experiencing financial hardship, please fill out a new free and reduced meal application, or contact the Food Service Director for assistance.

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 NSFS 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:

- **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.
- **Celebrate Fun Holidays and Events Such as National School Breakfast and Lunch Week**
- **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, 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/>.

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. Whether they're at the serving line ready with a spoon, spatula, or at the registers with a welcoming smile, these school lunch heroes go above and beyond to not only serve foods kids love to eat, but to ensure that students leave the cafeteria happier and healthier than they came in.

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