

The National School Lunch Program is a federally assisted meal program operating in many public and non-profit private schools and residential child cares.

Schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, sometimes including breakfast, are required by law to make accommodations for children who are unable to eat the standard prepared food because of a disability or health issue.

Accommodations may include food substitutions or modifications made to food texture. In order to make accommodations, schools must have a written statement signed by a licensed doctor stating the following:

- The child's disability
- Major life activity affected by the disability
- Explanation of why the disability restricts diet
- The food(s) to be excluded from the child's diet
- The choice of foods to be substituted

Schools may determine to make food substitutions for students who do not meet the definition of disability under the federal law but are medically certified as having a special dietary need. This includes food intolerances or allergies. In these cases, schools must have a written statement signed by a medical professional that includes:

- Identification of the medical or special condition restricting the child's diet
- The food(s) to be omitted from the child's diet
- The food or choice of foods to be substituted

Communication between schools and families is always important, including when food accommodations are needed. If your child has special dietary needs, and they want to eat with their friends, families are encouraged to do the following:

- ✓ Ask for a meeting that includes food service staff
- ✓ Understand the doctor's recommendations and share the information with your child's school
- ✓ Request school menu calendars in advance

When families and schools work together, students who have special food needs are able to participate in food related activities and feel included among classmates. Two national resources with helpful information for families with children who have special dietary needs:

Accommodating Disabilities in School Meal Programs: Guidance for School Food Authorities
www.fns.usda.gov

CDC National Food Allergy Guidelines and Resources
www.foodallergy.org

ASK Essential Questions

Do I have a letter from my child's doctor explaining his/her dietary needs?

Have I shared the doctor's letter with school?

Have I requested a meeting with the school?

Related ASK Resources on www.askresource.org

- Prior written notice
- Conflict resolution