

DATE: January 2010

TO: School Food Authority Administrators and Food Service Managers

FROM: Christine Emerson, Director
School Nutrition Programs

SUBJECT: Discipline During Meal Periods

USDA policy prohibits the denial of meals as disciplinary action against any student who is enrolled in a school participating in the School Nutrition Programs.

According to FNS Instruction 791-1, "Disciplinary action which indirectly results in the loss of meals or milk is allowable (e.g. a student is suspended from school). However, when the withholding of meals or milk is the disciplinary action; or if the disciplinary action directly results in the loss of meals or milk, it is inconsistent with the law and is not allowable (e.g., a student is suspended from school during the meal or milk period only).

School Food Authorities shall make a reimbursable meal or milk available to any child attending school who, for disciplinary reasons, is not allowed to eat in the cafeteria."

In addition, it is recommended that student disciplinary action take place at a time other than the school meal periods (lunch, breakfast, Afterschool snack). The goal of the School Nutrition Programs is to provide healthful meals that allow students to grow and learn. Detention and other discipline that is carried out during the meal periods interfere with the program's ability to meet this goal.

Meals should be a time of relaxation and socialization for students. When the school nutrition environment is pleasant, students eat better, do better in their academic course work, and have fewer behavioral problems. If the school's discipline policy leads to students avoiding meals or not eating well during meals, the benefits of the program are lost. Schools are encouraged to schedule disciplinary actions at a time other than meal periods.

If you have questions, please contact School Nutrition Programs at (406) 444-2501.