

SRPMIC SCHOOLS—Frequently asked questions for school kitchens.

1. If you know kids don't like (fill in the blank), why do you keep serving it?

The school kitchens are educating kids in new textures, new flavors, and new experiences. We each acquire tastes for food in many ways—what Mom fixes, what Grandma serves as a treat, what our friends like, what your cultural heritage is. It often takes 8 to 10 times serving a new food before some children will even try that food---we try to give kids the opportunity to try foods they may not have elsewhere.

Our schools have a 6-week cycle menu to keep from serving the same foods too often. If your favorite food happens to fall on a holiday (or early-release day at SRHS), you may not see it for 2-3 months. But if a food you don't like shows up once a month, it seems like it is on the menu all the time!

2. The kids throw a lot of food away. What can you do to change the amount of waste?

For younger kids, peer pressure is a big factor in school meals. If one person doesn't like a food, neither do the next kids in line. So, we have made the decision to serve all foods on the menu to kids in 6th grade and lower. We have some grades choosing their own fruits and vegetables—kids eat the foods they choose usually. At the high school, students are allowed to reject up to two food items they do not want. Very few of the high school students do not take the complete meal. Portions are controlled so calorie and nutrient content of meals is consistent.

All school meal programs have some waste built in. Kids normally reject some vegetables and fruits, but USDA requires us to serve these foods. With some items, it is cheaper to serve a large portion than to buy smaller portions (milk is an example—we can't purchase 4 oz. cartons of milk and sanitation is better with a pre-packaged carton than pouring milk from gallon containers for our youngest students).

3. Why do we have chocolate and strawberry milk instead of plain milk for kids? There is just too much sugar in flavored milks.

If children do not like white milk, they won't drink it. So, they miss out on the calcium, protein, and vitamin D needed for strong teeth and bones. Flavored milks have 1 to 2 tablespoons of added sugar which kids can easily burn up at recess. It's better to have kids drink flavored milk with some extra sugar than not to drink the milk (and all its nutrients) at all.

4. I'm an adult and I want salt and soda pop at lunch. Why can't I do what I want in the cafeteria?

All schools that offer meals are required to have a "Wellness Policy" that addresses the actions we are taking to address the epidemic of childhood obesity. Salt River Tribal members have a very high incidence of diabetes and related health problems—and even our young children are affected.

School administrators, kitchen staff, and other health professionals planned ways to teach our children healthy eating habits and the Wellness Committee felt that "adult role modeling" was one of the most important ways to do this. If kids see adults eating less-nutritious foods, they think that makes it okay.

So, the school cafeterias don't serve desserts except on special occasions; we don't serve salt packets (most of us eat way too much and it can make high blood pressure worse); we can't serve USDA-defined "foods of minimal nutritional value"---carbonated sodas are on the list; and we keep fat content down by baking foods instead of frying.

If adults choose to go with "forbidden" foods at meal time, we respectfully ask them to eat somewhere other than in the cafeteria.

5. Why do the adults have to get in line with the kids?

Our students will always allow adults to cut in line. By getting in the line with the kids, you will have the cashier's undivided attention when it is your turn—very helpful in making change or adding money or using your meal account in some other manner. In addition, the less congestion at the cash register, the safer it is for everyone juggling meal trays, milk cartons, and silverware.

Pretend you are at a fast food restaurant, you need to go to the end of the line and then wait while your order is prepared. We hope that our process is less cumbersome and helps teach everyone the value of teamwork and patience.

6. Why are the lines so long in the cafeteria? It seems like we wait forever.....

School administrators schedule student meal times that work with the "school day" requirements. The elementary school serves about 8 meals per MINUTE. Kitchen staff may slow the line down if kids start bumping into each other or getting unruly in other ways.

Students slow down the serving line if they choose to key in their ID # instead of swiping their ID card. We have to account for each student meal with an individual ID # for reimbursement from USDA. The food service staff have tried various ways to speed this process up and the "credit card" system works well for us.

Most classes are served in less than 10 minutes. You may wait longer at the neighborhood fast food store.

7. My child brings his lunch to school. Why does someone in the cafeteria have to check it?

Since we do not charge children for meals, we want to make sure that each student has access to all food items offered each day (milk, fruit, vegetable, grain, and meat or meat substitute). If you have not packed a milk, we will provide that, for instance. If you packed candy, soda, or foods that are not allowed in the lunch room, we will provide an entire meal and ask your child to not eat the foods he/she brought in. It's unfair for one child to have all the "goodies" when the others are having the school meal. We understand that some children are fussy about their food, but after a few weeks, most kids are okay eating our meals.

8. My child is allergic to _____. Will you make him/her take the food and eat it?

If you have informed the nurse/kitchen (in writing) about the food allergies, we will make sure ECEC and SRES kids won't be served that food. Except in special circumstances, SRHS students will be responsible for monitoring their own food allergies. They have access to two main dishes, fresh fruit and vegetable bars, and a variety of milk, including lactose-free milk.

Kitchen staff will never insist that any student eat any food offered. Eating disorders are very serious and we want all kids to have the option to eat what they want.

9. My kids (or I) don't like the menus. What can I do about them?

All menus have names and phone numbers for the SRHS and the ECEC/SRES kitchen managers. We encourage you to call, come visit the lunch rooms, or talk with the Food Program Manager (phone: 480-362-2084) about your concerns. Menus offer a mix of kid-favorites (pizza, chicken nuggets, burgers) and quick cooked meals (macaroni & cheese or casseroles, some stews, sandwiches, salads) that should suit almost everyone.

We encourage kids to eat breakfast every day—either at school or at home. Hungry kids don't learn as easily as well-fed children.

9. Why do I have to fill out so much paperwork for meals?

USDA requires one "family application" listing all students in SRPMIC schools each year. It must be completed within 30 days of the start of the school year so income information is current. Unless you have a change in family status or are picked for income verification, no other paperwork is required. If your children receive food stamps or cash assistance, we do not need the application at all.

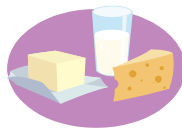
If your children qualify for maximum reimbursement for meals, the Tribal funds that help pay for school meals can be used for another purpose.

10. Why don't we get what's on the menu?

Our vendors often provide food for other districts and may not have enough of some products to provide for every school that is placing orders. So, the food may not have come in and we need so much we can't run to the grocery store to pick something up.

Other times, we may have staff out for various reasons, so we change the menu to a "faster or easier" menu to get all the work done with fewer hands. We may also switch to all disposable items at some sites so there is less clean up.

Let your cafeteria staff know what your favorite milks are so they can plan on having more available. During summer and holiday breaks, the dairies may not be packaging strawberry or other flavored milks.



Questions or Concerns: Please contact Terri McGehee at 480-362-2084.