

Sharing tables at schools

A sharing table is an area where students can place unwanted, unopened food and beverages from the school lunch program. Other students then have an opportunity to take food or beverages at no cost. A sharing table helps students reduce food waste by redistributing their uneaten food.



How to start a sharing table at your school

- Make school administration, kitchen staff, custodial staff, and lunch monitors aware of what a sharing table is and garner their support for creating and maintaining one.
- Kitchen staff play a key role in monitoring the sharing table between lunch periods and clearing the table at the end of the final lunch period of each day. Older students could volunteer to help with this!
- Decide if foods will be re-served or donated from the sharing table.
- Determine the cost of any new supplies (e.g., carts, bins, a small fridge, etc.), and if needed, determine the source of funding for your new sharing table.
- Promote and educate about your sharing table! Make sure students are aware of the sharing table through newsletters, announcements and orientations, classroom and cafeteria trainings, youth ambassadors, or flyers sent home to families.

Best practices for sharing tables

- Movable carts are recommended because they can be wheeled to the kitchen (helpful for reserving or packaging for donation).
- Use bright, instructive signs next to or on the sharing table, and keep it clean. Signs are available for free from Hennepin County.
- Track the food placed on the sharing table and what happens to it – adjust serving sizes to reduce food waste.

What items can go on a sharing table?



Unopened, packaged, shelf-stable foods served by my school

- Granola bars, cereal packs, crackers, applesauce, fruit cups
- Fruit with thick skin - bananas, oranges, washed apples

Unopened, refrigerated food served by my school

- Packaged fruits and vegetables (like sliced apples and baby carrots)
- Milk, yogurt, string cheese

What items can't go on a sharing table?

- Food brought from home/not served by the school
- Packaged items that have been opened
- Fruits and vegetables with thin skin (like pears or grapes) that aren't packaged

Staff play a key role in keeping sharing table food fresh and safe

Food collected on a sharing table must be monitored to ensure all items are clean and intact (all packaged items are sealed and clean). Monitors could be older students.

- We recommend refrigerating items like dairy products to encourage other students to take them (fridge needs to be at 41° F or lower)
- Any refrigerated items left out for longer than four hours must be composted or discarded
- If you accept apples, they need to be washed before they are available to other students
- Check with your school district staff about specific safety rules

Safety and regulations

Sharing tables are approved by the USDA, Minnesota Department of Education, and Minnesota Department of Health.

Contact

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Helpful resources

- [Signs for sharing tables from Hennepin County](#)
- [Share table guidance from the Minnesota Department of Education](#)
- [Share table guidance from the USDA](#)