School Lunch will be served!

School nutrition programs serve a vital role in student learning, ensuring that all children are well-nourished and ready to learn each and every day. During the school closures caused by the COVID-19 crisis, school nutrition programs rose to the challenge of continuing to feed Vermont’s children even while they were at home, providing an important connection to school and, for many, essential food and nourishment during a very difficult time.

In response to a recent WCAX story and the fact that many school districts are starting to make school reopening plans, The School Nutrition Association of Vermont (SNA-VT) would like to clarify that school meal service will continue to be offered safely when students return to school. Recent guidance issued by the CDC proposed several considerations for schools to help protect students, teachers, administrators, and staff and slow the spread of COVID-19. There are several considerations proposed for school nutrition programs, including one suggestion that students should bring their own meals from home. SNA-VT notes that this is just one of many considerations related to school food service, and that it is not a final decision or formal requirement. Other considerations included offering meal service in classrooms, rather than in the cafeteria, and refraining from self-serve or “family style” self-service models—both of which are adaptations that school nutrition programs are already actively considering.

School meals are prepared by well-trained and certified professionals who take great care in providing nutritious, well-balanced meals, including whole grains, lean proteins, and lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. Additionally, school nutrition professionals have extensive food safety training, make accommodations for students with food allergies, and have the skills and knowledge to ensure a safe and healthy experience for all.

Eating meals prepared at school may be the safest path forward, and will certainly be the most equitable. During this time of increasing food insecurity and uncertainty, many families may lack the time or resources to provide meals for their kids each day, and school meal programs will be an ever-more important tool for ensuring that all students are nourished and ready to learn for the duration of this crisis and beyond.

As plans for returning to school come into focus, SNA-VT wants to assure parents, students, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and community members that our school nutrition professionals across the state are well-equipped to incorporate additional health and safety procedures and to continue to provide high-quality service. We look forward to serving nutritious, safe, and delicious meals for all Vermont students next year.

There are many organizations in Vermont that have been working in partnership with each other to ensure that students and families across our state have access to food and nutrition during the COVID-19 pandemic. These organizations are continuing to work together to develop best practice going forward. SNA-VT and its members work in close collaboration with the Agency of Education-Child Nutrition Office, Hunger Free Vermont and VT Feed to advocate for the needs of Vermont children and families, stay connected to current guidance from state and federal authorities, and plan for a safe future.

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Sincerely,
The School Nutrition Association of Vermont