

## Civil Rights

School Nutrition Program

### Overview

Staff who are interacting with School Nutrition Program participants must complete annual civil rights training. This alternate training fact sheet will ensure that All workers are aware of potential civil rights concerns and how to effectively ensure that the program benefits are made available to all students in a non-discriminatory manner.

Discrimination is any different treatment, which makes a distinction of one person or group from others, either intentionally or by neglect, based on the federal protected classes: **race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and age.**

### Key Points

1. All students must be allowed equal opportunities to participate in school nutrition programs.
2. All students must be treated in the same manner (including seating arrangements, meal times and service, etc.).
3. Denial of meals as a disciplinary action against a student is prohibited.
4. Overt identification or sharing of students' eligibility status (free, reduced-price, or paid) is prohibited.
5. Reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that persons with limited English proficiency are able to access the school nutrition programs.
6. If interpreters are needed, children should not be used as interpreters. Volunteer interpreters should be trained on confidentiality.
7. Reasonable accommodations must be made for students with disabilities to ensure their equal access to participate in the school nutrition programs. For example, alternative meals or meal components must be provided to students who request them due to medical necessity.

**Consult with your food service director with any questions.**

### How to File a Complaint

Any person who believes they have been discriminated against based on federal protected classes has a right to file a complaint within *180 days* of the alleged discriminatory action.

A complaint may be submitted to:

1. USDA: U. S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, (866) 632-9992 (toll free), (202) 260-1026, (202) 401-0216 (TDD)
2. Minnesota Department of Education: Supervisor, School Nutrition Programs, 1500 Highway 36 West, Roseville, MN 55113 (800) 366-8922
  - Complaints may be written, verbal, or observed and related to any area of the school nutrition program.
  - Complaints may be submitted anonymously.
  - Complaints can be related to any area of the school nutrition programs such as administration, food service, or employment.

## Test Yourself!

Mark each situation where a civil rights violation has occurred.

- The lunchroom monitor separates Spanish-speaking students to sit at a different table in the cafeteria during lunch.
- A student helper has students mark their own names off on a roster as they pick up a grab-and-go breakfast. The roster indicates which students are paid, reduced-price, or free.
- The teacher requires the students to turn in their homework in order to receive their breakfast bag in the classroom.
- The lunchroom monitor only offers boys the extra milks after everyone has gone through the lunch line.
- The second chance breakfast cart is placed at a busy intersection and students in wheelchairs cannot access it in the short passing time.
- The teacher distributes breakfast bags to paying students first, then to students eligible for reduced-price meals, and finally to students eligible for free meals to easily take counts of each category.
- The student helper decides not to bring the lactose-free milk when bringing breakfast to the classroom because it is heavy to carry, so the students with lactose intolerance miss out.

(Answer Key: All are civil rights violations)

## Using Respectful Language

It is also important to convey equal opportunity in messaging and interactions with participants. This includes using inclusive, respectful and culturally sensitive language. For example, it is more respectful to put the person first. Instead of saying “a disabled person”, use the phrase “a person with a disability”. When in doubt, just ask someone who is more familiar with what the preferred terminology is.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES on the MDE website: <https://education.mn.gov>

### [Civil Rights for USDA Programs](#)

MDE > Districts, Schools, and Educators > Food and Nutrition > Civil Rights for USDA Programs

### [Civil Rights for School Nutrition Programs webinar \(25 minutes\)](#)

MDE > Districts, Schools, and Educators > Food and Nutrition > Civil Rights for USDA Programs > Civil Rights for School Nutrition Programs

### [Special Dietary Needs](#)

MDE > Districts, Schools, and Educators > Food and Nutrition > School Nutrition Programs > Nutritional Quality and Meal Pattern > Special Dietary Needs

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider.