

## OUTLINE: Feeding Students with Special Dietary Needs

Use the following information to help foodservice staff understand their role and responsibilities related to feeding children with special dietary needs and know where to access valuable guidance/resource materials.

### I. Background

#### A. School Nutrition Programs must:

Follow the laws and procedures

Meet same nutrition standards as for students without special dietary needs

Contribute to the success of *all* students

#### B. Laws

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) require a free and appropriate public education be provided for children with disabilities. You must make substitutions to regular meals for children with disabilities, when approved by a licensed physician. All of these laws must be followed throughout the school, including the cafeteria and all food service staff should be aware of their roles and responsibilities.

#### C. Disabilities

Some students have special dietary needs. By law, schools are required to make **reasonable changes** for students with documented disabilities. In the situation when students have other medical issues and dietary requests, such as a religious preference, food intolerance, or mild allergy, it is recommended, but not mandatory, that schools make accommodations.

#### D. Process – If a student has a disability...

1. Family gets a *licensed physician's statement* (or diet order)
2. Family returns statement to the school RN (which then goes to nutrition program staff)
3. Food Service makes reasonable changes and provides them at no extra charge
4. Family sends in updated physician's statement, if changes are made
5. Administration, School Nurses, and Teachers work with Food Service

If a student has **another medical concern (that is not a disability)** –

1. Family gets a *recognized medical authority* to sign a diet order
2. Family returns statement to the school RN (which then goes to nutrition program staff)
  - a. A recognized medical authority may be a physician, physician's assistant, or nurse practitioner
3. Food Service determines whether or not to make reasonable changes and provides them at no extra charge
4. Family sends in updated physician's statement, if changes are made
5. Administration, School Nurses, and Teachers work with Food Service

So, the process is essentially the same, the only differences are that accommodation in the case that a child has a disability is mandatory, but in the case of a medical concern that is NOT a disability, making accommodations is optional. Additionally, only a licensed physician may sign a diet order when a child has a disability, but a recognized medical authority may do so in the case of another medical concern that is not a disability.

## E. Diet Orders

A licensed physician's statement, or diet order, must include:

- the child's disability;
- an explanation of why the disability restricts the child's diet;
- the major life activity affected by the disability;
- the food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet and the food or choice of foods that must be substituted

If a child has a medical condition that is not a disability, the diet order must include:

- an identification of the medical or other special dietary condition which restricts the child's diet;
- the food or foods to be omitted from the child's diet; and the food or choice of foods to be substituted.
- Must be signed by a medical authority

## II. Roles and Responsibilities

### A. Food Service Staff

#### 1. Obtain a signed diet order from the family

Remember that the diet order must be signed by a licensed physician if the child has a disability or a recognized medical authority if the child has some other medical concern

Review the diet order for completeness

Remember that the diet order must list the student's disability, how the disability affects a major life activity, how the disability restricts the child's diet, and which food(s) that must be replaced and which food(s) to be used instead

Be sure to understand the meal changes required

If a staff member cannot determine how to follow the diet order, he/she should contact the director or the physician for assistance. **Under no circumstances should any member of food service staff revise, change, or make assumptions about a diet order, even a Director or Manager**

Make reasonable changes, in accord with the diet order

Any meal accommodations that are prescribed for a child with a disability must be made, by law. However, it is the discretion of the food service department whether or not to make reasonable changes for students with other medical concerns or dietary preferences. Directors or Managers should provide training on how to modify menus.

Communicate with parents, other school personnel, and medical authorities regarding diet modifications

The goal for all parties involved is to help the student be well nourished and able to succeed in school. Working as a team is the easiest way to accomplish this goal.

Maintain records on students with special dietary needs and update them as needed. If changes are required, proper documentation and an amended diet order is essential.

#### 2. Additionally, food service personnel do have the responsibilities of:

**Honoring confidentiality.** All documentation, including the diet order should be kept in a secure location. Food service personnel should never discuss the special dietary needs of students with others. This includes other students and faculty.

Food service personnel are obligated to **provide substitutions and modifications according to a diet order and to document the accommodations made in your food records.**

Food service directors, food service managers and staff should ***never interpret, revise, or change a diet order.*** Even a registered dietitian should not amend a diet order.

Food service staff should **know how to read nutrition labels** to determine whether or not that food item is an appropriate substitution.

Diet orders are not required to be renewed on a yearly basis; however, we encourage you to do so.

Schools **may not charge** children with disabilities or certified special dietary needs that require food substitutions or modifications **more than they charge other children** for program meals or snacks

Food service staff must **be consistent.** Meals should be prepared under the same standards as other meals and should be tasty and eye-appealing.

**Contribute to** an IEP (Individualized Education Plan, Individualized Health Care Plan, or other team **meetings for students with special nutrition needs as requested.** Administrators need to promote teamwork and communication among all school staff, parents, and school food personnel

#### B. School Nurse

In order to provide the best medical care for diabetic students, your school nurse may request your help in securing portion sizes as well as the carbohydrate content of reimbursable meal items.