**Chittenango Central School District**

**Meal Modification Practices for School Meals**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) nondiscrimination regulation (7 CFR 15b), as well as the regulations governing the Child Nutrition Programs, make it clear that substitutions to the regular school meal must be made, at no extra cost, for children who are unable to eat meals served in any Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) because of their disabilities.

Providing Access to Meals Served:

* **Modifications within the Meal Pattern** — If a meal modification for a child's disability can be made within the meal pattern, a medical statement is not necessary and the Program Operator/SFA is not required to obtain a medical statement.
* **Modifications Outside of the Meal Pattern** — In a disability situation, meal modifications outside the meal pattern are reimbursable, provided the request is supported by a medical statement signed by a State licensed healthcare professional.

**Medical Statement**

In order to provide modifications for your child, the school may request a medical statement from his/her doctor.  Typically, medical statements must meet the following requirements:

* Be signed by a licensed healthcare professional in your state.
* Include specific information, such as:
  + Your child’s disability.
    - What major life activity/activities it affects (bowels, cognition, speech, behavior, etc.).
  + The reason why your child’s disability restricts their diet.
  + Foods to be omitted from your child’s diet
  + Choice of foods for substitution
  + IEP considerations (see below)

If your child’s IEP already includes the information above, you do not need to provide a separate medical statement. Likewise, medical statements do not need to be updated on an annual basis as long as the school has a document on file that reflects your child’s current dietary needs.

Most importantly, the district cannot ask for medical records or medical charts as part of the medical statement.

If your child participates in a school meal program, and they meet the conditions mentioned above, the district must provide a safe meal for them at no additional cost.

When making food modifications, schools:

* Cannot base decisions on stereotypes or what works for other individuals with the same condition.
  + For example, suppose the gluten content in Cheerios causes gastrointestinal issues for your child. In this scenario, the school cannot claim it’s acceptable to serve your child Cheerios because another student with gluten sensitivities/allergies eats them without issues.
* Must ensure all foods they provide are free from harmful ingredients.
  + If a food’s ingredients are unknown, they cannot serve it to your child.
  + Furthermore, they must work to prevent exposure to allergens through cross-contact by the use of proper storage, preparation, and cleaning techniques.
    - For example, the school must prepare and cook gluten-free items in a dedicated area and serve the meal with clean gloves.
  + However, meals provided by the school do not need to mirror what’s on the menu for other students. Rather, they simply must accommodate your child’s needs.
    - To demonstrate, if spaghetti with whole wheat pasta and meat sauce is on the “regular” menu, the school can serve your child a turkey sandwich on gluten-free bread.
  + Also, schools participating in an Offer Versus Serve (OVS) program cannot eliminate a specific food component from the program for your child.
    - For example, the school must provide a whole grain option for children who cannot eat gluten.
* Must provide a safe environment for your child to consume their meal.
* Cannot charge children with disabilities extra fees for modified meals.
  + Even though allergy-safe foods may cost more to prepare, schools cannot charge children with disabilities more than they charge other children for meals.

When discussing how your child qualifies for food accommodations and modifications with the district, please keep the following in mind:

Physical or mental impairments do not have to be life-threatening.

If the impairments your child experiences are temporary or episodic, the district must provide reasonable modifications.

This stipulation may help kids who suffer from chronic underlying infections like PANDAS/PANS.

Dietary restrictions based on general health concerns do not qualify as a disability.

In other words, the school is under no obligation to provide organic food options for your child.

For more information on United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) guidelines for accommodating students with food allergies and intolerances, please visit [2017 Edition of Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs.](https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/2017-edition-accommodating-children-disabilities-school-meal-programs" \t "_blank)