



FOOD SHARE TABLE: Helping Schools Save Food A Step-by-Step Guide for the Oakland Unified School District

In an effort to prevent food from going to waste in schools, all school cafeterias in the Oakland Unified School District have food share tables. These allow students to share their unwanted, still sealed or unbitten food items, so other students can select these food and beverage items during mealtime.

Setup

1. **Choose a container.** Wire baskets or clear plastic containers are provided by Nutrition Services.
2. The food share table is part of the school cafeteria's waste sorting station. Ideally, **place it first in line**, before the liquid dump bucket. Do not place the food share collection container directly on the floor or at the same level as the liquid dump bucket.
3. At schools that use a double row of waste bins, the food share station can be set up in the middle, where students stack their trays.
4. **Consider separate containers** for cold, hot and produce items to control temperature and keep the table organized.
5. **Clearly mark the food share table** with signage from Nutrition Services that reads "Food Share" and shows examples of items.



During Meal Service

Students:

- Place unwanted, sealed/unbitten items into the collection container.
- Select items they intend to eat during the meal period.
- Items brought from home are not acceptable.

Kitchen staff (with support from custodians and cafeteria monitors):

- Monitor the food share table, at a minimum in between each meal service and at the end of breakfast, lunch or supper service.
- Oversee students to ensure they don't fill up on food share items only, to encourage eating a balanced meal.
- Monitor food share item temperatures, especially on hot days. See food safety section.



After Meal Service

1. Bring all remaining items from the food share table into the kitchen for sorting and cleaning.
2. Select and clean individually packaged yogurt and room temperature items, such as packaged crackers and whole fruit. These items can be served again and claimed for meal reimbursement by the USDA.
3. Hot and cold items (except individually packaged yogurt) cannot be served again on site. These items should be donated if a food donation program exists and if they are still safe to eat, see table below. Otherwise they should be composted, removing any plastic packaging before placing items in the compost bin. If removing the packaging is not an option, discard to the trash/landfill bin as a last resort.
4. Wipe down and/or clean the food share container and take back to the cafeteria sorting station.

	Safe temperature zone (STZ)	Allowable time outside the STZ	Ways to control temperature
Cold food * e.g. milk	41°F or lower	Up to 2 hours below or at 60°F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Set up a separate area for cold items on the food share table. ▪ Use ice buckets or use ice sheets.
Hot food e.g. pasta dish	135°F or higher	Up to 2 hours below 135°F	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Set up a separate area for hot items on the food share table.
Room-temp. food e.g. apple, crackers	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No temperature concern. ▪ Ready to serve again after cleaning.

* Exception: Individually packaged yogurts can be served again.

Food Safety

The California Retail Food Code, Section 113996, requires that all *Potentially Hazardous Foods*—such as milk, meals containing meats or cooked vegetables, or certain cut fruits such as melons—be maintained under proper food holding temperatures to prevent the potential for rapid bacterial growth. Once food items leave their hot or cold environment, they are considered in the *Temperature Danger Zone*. Food is allowed to be in this range for a total of four hours, *however, for Food Share Tables this time is limited to two hours. Any food left out after two hours should be composted or discarded.* Fortunately, during a typical school meal period, food will be outside the safe temperatures for only a very short period of time. Nevertheless, schools need to observe safe food handling procedures and customize their practices to meet Alameda County Environmental Health food safety requirements.

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