

Share Tables: Guidance for DC Schools

Schools have an exciting role to play in making Washington, DC the greenest, healthiest and most livable city in the world—and you can start in your cafeteria! Put this strategy into action to **reduce waste** and **increase healthy food consumption** at your school.

FAQ

What is a Share Table?

Share tables are stations for collecting and redistributing unwanted food items that are unopened and uneaten, rather than throwing them away. For example, if a student is served an orange but chooses not to eat it, the orange can be placed on the share table for another student to take. Your school can use a share table as a strategy for increasing the consumption of nutritious foods and decreasing waste. Schools in Washington, D.C. are encouraged to have share tables as part of their food service and waste management programming.

We want to set up a share table at our school—where do we start?

- Work with your Principal, Custodial Foreman, and cafeteria monitors to develop a plan for monitoring the share table during all meal periods. Write your plan down and keep it in a place where it can be revisited and revised throughout the year.
- Communicate share table rules with all students and staff, and ask parents and guardians for input on share table rules.

What happens during meal times?

- Choose a location in your cafeteria to collect unopened and uneaten foods, such as near a waste sorting station.
- Students can put food on the share table or take food from it.
- Make sure the share table has an adult monitor (not a cafeteria employee) at all times.
- After all meal periods are over, move leftover share table items that do not need a temperature control out of the cafeteria to a central location (like the main office), where students and staff can grab snacks for the rest of the day.
- For potentially hazardous foods, maintain proper temperature (41°F or colder) and temperature logs by storing foods in temperature-controlled storage, such as a cooler or fridge.
- At the end of the day, leftover food from the share table should be donated or thrown away.



Photo by Brooke Hartman



Yes - Share!

Put these items on the share table for others to eat.

Unopened and uneaten...

- Fruits or vegetables with inedible peels, like oranges and bananas.*
- Individually packaged shelf-stable items.
- Temperature-controlled foods, such as yogurt or milk, when a temperature-control mechanism **is** in place.

**If a school decides, fruits and vegetables with edible peels may be redistributed outside of the cafeteria if they are clearly labeled such that anyone who takes the item knows that they are responsible for washing the item before eating it.*

Donate!

Send these foods to a food pantry, homeless shelter, or other 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Unopened and uneaten...

- Fruits and vegetables with edible peels.*
- Foods containing common food allergens, such as nuts.
- Share table leftovers (at the end of the day).

No Way!

These items **DO NOT** belong on a share table and shouldn't be donated. Compost and recycle if possible, or put these food items in the trash.

- Unpackaged or unsealed items.
- Open individually packaged items, such as opened milk cartons.
- Items in containers that can be opened and resealed (such as a carry-out container).
- Items that have bites taken out of them.
- Frozen foods.
- Foods with peels that have been opened.
- Temperature-controlled foods (such as dairy) when a temperature-control mechanism **is not** in place.

Share Table Best Practices

- Set up a share table to be part of your cafeteria waste sorting station, and help students learn how recycle by sorting items correctly, including unopened and uneaten food.
- Encourage students to only take what they plan to eat.
- Emphasize the importance of healthy eating and trying new foods.
- Invite students to participate in the share table process, teaching them about the importance of food safety, community citizenship, and recycling.
- Donate leftover foods to a community food bank, homeless shelter, or similar 501(c)(3) organization. Schools are protected from liability under the **Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act**.
- Remind students that, although they cannot place opened foods on the share table, they can take extra food home or save it to eat later by keeping the food in their lunch bags.

Questions? Contact DC Health at Food.Safety@dc.gov

