

The Cafeteria Classroom: What Custodians Can Do to Create a Positive Cafeteria Environment

It's no secret that custodians play a very important role in keeping a school going. Their dedication to serving and anticipating people's needs is essential. Custodians also can contribute to students' education, helping them learn how to care for the physical environment in which they spend the majority of their day. The school cafeteria is one of the places where custodians play a key role in setting the tone, establishing expectations, building relationships, and helping students learn. Listed below are five ways custodians can have a positive effect on the cafeteria environment.

1. Be a part of the team

The team of staff that are responsible for the cafeteria environment usually includes custodians, paraeducators, food service staff, and school administrators. All members of the team need clear expectations about who is responsible for what. Ask questions, help define your role, and be sure you know what is expected of you so you can maximize your impact.

2. Identify the best flow for the cafeteria

How students move through the lunch line and the waste station is important to the cafeteria environment. The flow should be efficient and clear, minimizing confusion, cross-traffic, and bottlenecks. Work with the cafeteria team to look at the flow of students moving around the cafeteria. Try different table configurations to see what works best and feels right.

3. Engage students in helping to care for the cafeteria environment

Keeping the cafeteria clean is important for students to feel like they matter and they can enjoy their meal. Everyone has a role to play in maintaining a clean cafeteria environment. Help set clear expectations for students about taking responsibility for cleaning up after themselves. Be sure there is adequate time in the schedule to clean between lunches. Many schools enlist the help of students in sweeping, wiping off tables, and assisting other at the waste station.



4. Teach students how to reduce and manage food waste

Your role in the cafeteria is essential to help students learn about how to manage food waste responsibly. Position yourself at the waste station to help students learn how to sort their food waste properly, why it matters, and why they should care. Most students want to do the right thing and they need you to help.



5. Build relationships

You might be the one person that makes a child's day. Make eye contact, smile, call students by name, have a conversation. Building relationships sets a positive tone in the cafeteria and will help in your role as an educator.