

# **IDENTIFYING REIMBURSABLE SCHOOL MEALS**

**PARTICIPANT'S WORKBOOK**



INSTITUTE OF  
*child nutrition*  
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# IDENTIFYING REIMBURSABLE SCHOOL MEALS

## PARTICIPANT'S WORKBOOK

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**Key Areas: 1 – Nutrition and 2 – Operations**

**USDA Professional Standards Codes: Menu Planning (1100) and Serving Food (2200)**

# **INSTITUTE OF CHILD NUTRITION**

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Improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

### **VISION**

Lead the nation in providing research, education, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

### **MISSION**

Provide relevant research-based information and services that advance the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

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Institute of Child Nutrition. (2026). *Identifying reimbursable school meals participant's workbook*. University, MS: Author.

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# FUNCTIONAL AREA AND COMPETENCIES

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## Functional Area 5: USDA Meal Program Requirements

### Competency 5.1. Reports and Records

**Knowledge Statement:** 5.1b. Knows meal pattern requirements for a reimbursable meal.

**Source:** *Institute of Child Nutrition. (2022). Competencies, knowledge, and skills of effective school nutrition technicians/assistants. University, MS: Author.*

# PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

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## Operations – 2000

### Key Area Code: Serving Food (2200)

Employee will be able to correctly and efficiently serve food portions to meet all USDA school meal pattern requirements and encourage healthy food selections, including those for special diets.

**2210** – Identify/serve portions of food items according to USDA school meal pattern requirements and diet restrictions.

**2220** – Use Offer versus Serve correctly.

# OBJECTIVES

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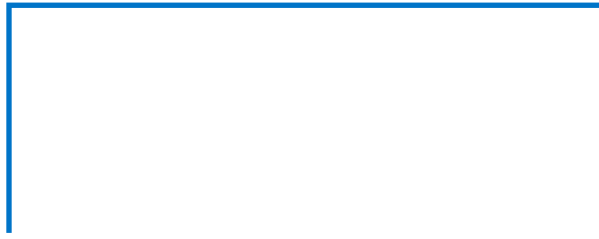
- Recall the required NSLP reimbursable meal components.
- Categorize foods into the correct NSLP meal components.
- Recognize an OVS reimbursable meal at lunch.
- Recall the SBP reimbursable meal components.
- Categorize foods into the correct SBP meal components.
- Recognize an OVS reimbursable meal at breakfast.

# INTRODUCTION

The [National School Lunch Program](#) (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides children with nutritionally balanced, low or no-cost lunches each school day. The program was established under the National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1946. All schools are required to offer students the five required meal components. Meal components are offered in quantities that meet or exceed the minimum serving sizes established by the regulations. The meal components at lunch are fruits, vegetables, grains, meats/meat alternates, and fluid milk. Programs implementing Offer versus Serve (OVS) at lunch follow specific guidelines. OVS is required for lunches served in high schools but is optional in middle and elementary schools. During OVS lunch service, students must select at least three of the five required meal components, including at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruit and/or vegetable, to have a reimbursable lunch.

The [School Breakfast Program](#) (SBP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It began as a pilot project in 1966 and was made permanent in 1975. The required meal components at breakfast are the grains and/or meats/meat alternates component, the fruits (vegetables as a substitute) component, and the fluid milk component. For OVS at breakfast, schools must offer students all three required meal components in quantities that meet or exceed the minimum serving sizes established by the regulations. Under OVS, at breakfast, a student must be offered at least four food items and select at least three food items, one of which must be  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruit and/or vegetables.

## Notes



## Resources

Please note: Additional resources can be found starting on the next page.



United States Department of Agriculture

FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE

# National School Lunch Program

## What Is the National School Lunch Program?

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or no-cost lunches to children each school day in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions (RCCIs). The NSLP was established under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, signed into law in 1946.

## Who Administers NSLP?

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers the Program at the Federal level. At the State level, NSLP is administered by State agencies, which operate NSLP through agreements with school food authorities.

## How Does NSLP Work?

The NSLP is operated by public or nonprofit private schools at the high school level or below. Public or nonprofit RCCIs may also participate in NSLP, and charter schools may participate as public schools. Participating schools receive cash subsidies as well as nutritious, 100 percent domestic foods known as USDA Foods for each reimbursable meal they serve. In exchange, schools and institutions must serve lunches that meet the Federal meal pattern requirements and offer them at a free or reduced price to all eligible children. School food authorities can also be reimbursed through NSLP for snacks served to children who participate in an approved afterschool program.

## How Can Children Participate in Free or Reduced-Price School Lunch?

Children may be determined “categorically eligible” for free meals through participation in certain Federal assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or based on their status as a homeless, migrant, runaway, or foster child. Children enrolled in a federally funded Head Start Program or a comparable State-funded pre-kindergarten program are also categorically eligible for free meals.

Children can also qualify for free or reduced-price school meals based on their household income and family size. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those from families with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals. Schools may not charge children more than 40 cents for a reduced-price lunch. To see the current Income Eligibility Guidelines, please visit: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/income-eligibility-guidelines>.

## Where Can I Go To Learn More About NSLP?

For more information, please contact the State agency responsible for administering NSLP in your State: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/contacts>.

## Whom at FNS Can I Contact To Discuss NSLP?

Please contact the FNS Division of External and Governmental Affairs at [fns.govaffairs@usda.gov](mailto:fns.govaffairs@usda.gov).

Key National School Lunch Program Data	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019 (estimate)
Average participation (in millions)	30.5	30.4	30.0	29.6	29.6
Lunches served (in millions)	5,005.4	5,052.9	4,891.5	4,865.7	4,866.4

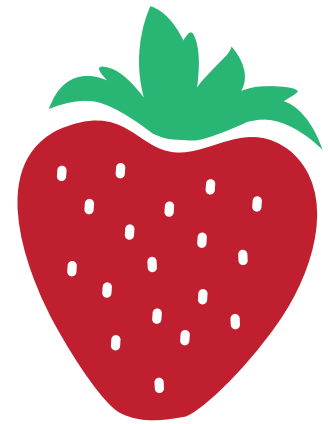
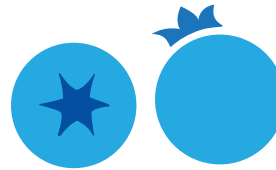
FY = Fiscal Year

January 2021, FNS-801  
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# THE SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM



## 1. What is the School Breakfast Program?

The School Breakfast Program (SBP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions. The SBP started in 1966 as a pilot project, and was made a permanent entitlement program by Congress in 1975.

Participation in the SBP has slowly but steadily grown over the years: 1970: 0.5 million children; 1980: 3.6 million children; 1990: 4.0 million children; 2000: 7.5 million children; 2010: 11.67 million children; and 2016: 14.57 million children.

## 2. Who administers the SBP?

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) administers the Program at the Federal level. At the State level, the Program is administered by State agencies, which operate the SBP through agreements with local school food authorities. State agency contact information is available at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/school-meals-contacts>.

## 3. How does the Program work?

The SBP is generally operated by public or non-profit private schools of high school grade or below. Public or non-profit private residential child care institutions may also participate in the SBP, and charter schools may participate in the SBP as public schools. School districts and independent schools that choose to participate in the Program must serve breakfast meals meeting Federal nutrition requirements, and offer free or reduced

price breakfasts to all eligible children. In exchange, participating institutions receive cash subsidies from the USDA for each reimbursable meal served.

## 4. What are the nutrition requirements for school breakfasts?

All school breakfasts must meet Federal nutrition requirements, though decisions about the specific foods to serve and how the foods are prepared are made by local school food authorities. Information about the SBP meal pattern requirements may be found on the School Meals website: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>.

## 5. How can children qualify for free or reduced price school breakfast?

Children may be determined "categorically eligible" for free meals through participation in certain Federal Assistance Programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or based on their status as a homeless, migrant, runaway, or foster child. Children enrolled in a federally-funded Head Start Program, or a comparable State-funded pre-kindergarten program, are also categorically eligible for free meals. Children can also qualify for free or reduced price school meals based on household income and family size. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for free meals.

**SCHOOL BREAKFAST**  
PROGRAM



United States Department of Agriculture

Those with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the Federal poverty level are eligible for reduced price meals. Schools may not charge children more than 30 cents for a reduced price breakfast. To see the current Income Eligibility Guidelines, please visit: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/income-eligibility-guidelines>.

### 6. What are the current reimbursement rates for participating schools?

School food authorities are reimbursed for meals based on children's free, reduced price, or paid eligibility status. For current SBP reimbursement rates, please see: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/rates-reimbursement>. Schools serving a higher percentage of low-income students (at least 40 percent of children receive free or reduced price lunch) are considered "severe need" schools and are eligible for a higher reimbursement rate. Schools in Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico also receive a higher reimbursement rate, due to the higher cost of food in those areas.

### 7. What breakfast service options are available to schools?

In addition to the traditional, cafeteria-based breakfast model, schools may also consider an alternative breakfast model. For example, "Breakfast in the Classroom" involves serving the breakfast meal to children during a morning class, often while the teacher is taking attendance or giving classroom announcements. Schools operating "Grab & Go Breakfast" serve children a breakfast "to go," often in a paper or plastic bag, before school or during a morning break. To learn more about these and other breakfast service options, please see the School Breakfast Program webpage: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sbp/school-breakfast-program-sbp>.

### 8. What additional support do schools receive from FNS?

Through its Team Nutrition initiative, FNS provides training and technical assistance to school nutrition professionals to enable them to prepare and serve nutritious meals that meet the Program meal pattern requirements and appeal to children. The Team Nutrition Resource Library has web-based resources available to help children and school nutrition professionals understand the link between diet and health. State and local agencies may request free printed copies of certain Team Nutrition materials. To learn more, visit: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/team-nutrition>.

### 9. Where can I go to learn more about the SBP?

For more information about the SBP, please contact the State agency responsible for the administration of the Program in your State: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/school-meals-contacts>.



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**SCHOOL BREAKFAST**  
PROGRAM



## National School Lunch Program Meal Pattern

	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Meal Components	Amount of Food <sup>1</sup> per Week		
	(minimum per day)		
Fruits (cups) <sup>2</sup>	2 ½ ( ½ )	2 ½ ( ½ )	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups) <sup>2</sup>	3 ¾ ( ¾ )	3 ¾ ( ¾ )	5 (1)
Dark Green Subgroup <sup>3</sup>	½	½	½
Red/Orange Subgroup <sup>3</sup>	¾	¾	1 ¼
Beans, Peas, and Lentils Subgroup <sup>3</sup>	½	½	½
Starchy Subgroup <sup>3</sup>	½	½	½
Other Vegetables Subgroup <sup>3,4</sup>	½	½	¾
Additional Vegetables from Any Subgroup to Reach Total	1	1	1 ½
Grains (oz. eq.) <sup>5</sup>	8-9 (1)	8-10 (1)	10-12 (2)
Meats/Meat Alternates (oz. eq.) <sup>6</sup>	8-10 (1)	9-10 (1)	10-12 (2)
Fluid Milk (cups) <sup>7</sup>	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
<b>Dietary Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week<sup>8</sup></b>			
Minimum-Maximum Calories (kcal)	550-650	600-700	750-850
Saturated Fat (% of total calories)	<10	<10	<10
Added Sugars (% of total calories)	<10	<10	<10
Sodium Limit: In place through June 30, 2027	≤1,110 mg	≤1,225 mg	≤1,280 mg
Sodium Limit: Must be implemented by July 1, 2027	≤935 mg	≤1,035 mg	≤1,080 mg

<sup>1</sup> Food items included in each group and subgroup and amount equivalents.

<sup>2</sup> Minimum creditable serving is ⅛ cup. One quarter-cup of dried fruit counts as ½ cup of fruit; 1 cup of leafy greens counts as ½ cup of vegetables. No more than half of the fruit or vegetable offerings may be in the form of juice. All juice must be 100 percent full-strength.

<sup>3</sup> Larger amounts of these vegetables may be served.

<sup>4</sup> This subgroup consists of “Other vegetables” as defined in paragraph (c)(2)(ii)(E) of this section. For the purposes of the NSLP, the “Other vegetables” requirement may be met with any

additional amounts from the dark green, red/orange, and bean, peas, and lentils vegetable subgroups as defined in paragraph (c)(2)(ii) of this section.

<sup>5</sup> Minimum creditable serving is 0.25 oz. eq. At least 80 percent of grains offered weekly (by ounce equivalents) must be whole grain-rich as defined in § 210.2 of this chapter, and the remaining grains items offered must be enriched.

<sup>6</sup> Minimum creditable serving is 0.25 oz. eq.

<sup>7</sup> Minimum creditable serving is 8 fluid ounces. All fluid milk must be fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1 percent fat or less) and must meet the requirements in paragraph (d) of this section.

<sup>8</sup> By July 1, 2027, schools must meet the dietary specification for added sugars. Schools must meet the sodium limits by the dates specified in this chart. Discretionary sources of calories may be added to the meal pattern if within the dietary specifications.



## School Breakfast Program Meal Pattern

	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
<b>Meal Components</b>	<b>Amount of Food<sup>1</sup> per Week</b>		
	<b>(minimum per day)</b>		
Fruits (cups) <sup>2</sup>	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups) <sup>2</sup>	0	0	0
Dark Green Subgroup	0	0	0
Red/Orange Subgroup	0	0	0
Beans, Peas, and Lentils Subgroup	0	0	0
Starchy Subgroup	0	0	0
Other Vegetables Subgroup	0	0	0
Grains or Meats/Meat Alternates (oz. eq) <sup>3</sup>	7-10 (1)	8-10 (1)	9-10 (1)
Fluid Milk (cups) <sup>4</sup>	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
<b>Dietary Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week<sup>5</sup></b>			
Minimum-Maximum Calories (kcal)	350-500	400-550	450-600
Saturated Fat (% of total calories)	<10	<10	<10
Added Sugars (% of total calories)	<10	<10	<10
Sodium Limit: In place through June 30, 2027	≤540 mg	≤600 mg	≤640 mg
Sodium Limit: Must be implemented by July 1, 2027	≤485 mg	≤535 mg	≤570 mg

<sup>1</sup> Food items included in each group and subgroup and amount equivalents.

<sup>2</sup> Minimum creditable serving is  $\frac{1}{8}$  cup. Schools must offer 1 cup of fruit daily and 5 cups of fruit weekly. Schools may substitute vegetables for fruit at breakfast as described in paragraphs (c)(2)(i) and (ii) of this section.

<sup>3</sup> Minimum creditable serving is 0.25 oz. eq. School may offer grains, meats/meat alternates, or a combination of both to meet the daily and weekly ounce equivalents for this combined component. At least 80 percent of grains offered weekly at breakfast must be whole grain-rich as defined in § 210.2 of this chapter, and the remaining grain items offered must be enriched.

<sup>4</sup> Minimum creditable serving is 8 fluid ounces. All fluid milk must be fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1 percent fat or less) and must meet the requirements in paragraph (d) of this section.

<sup>5</sup> By July 1, 2027, schools must meet the dietary specification for added sugars. Schools must meet the sodium limits by the dates specified in this chart. Discretionary sources of calories may be added to the meal pattern if within the dietary specifications.

# LESSON 1: REIMBURSABLE SCHOOL MEALS—LUNCH

## Introduction

In Lesson 1: Reimbursable School Meals—Lunch, participants will engage in a comprehensive 90-minute session that highlights the critical components of the NSLP. The lesson begins with a refresher on the required meal components, including food types and grade group considerations, and progresses to categorizing these components within the NSLP meal patterns. The session deepens understanding by exploring the OVS provision, highlighting how it impacts meal reimbursement. Through interactive activities, discussions, and practical exercises, participants will learn to recognize and categorize foods effectively to ensure each meal served qualifies for federal reimbursement.

A meal component refers to one food group that makes up a reimbursable lunch under the NSLP. Reimbursable meals allow the Child Nutrition Program to request financial support depending on the number of meals served. Reimbursement amounts are distributed back to the school program based on the student population that qualifies for free/reduced/paid lunch status. There are five required meal components at lunch. Each meal component must be offered in at least the daily minimum required amounts, and where applicable, the weekly minimum amounts must also be met. The meal components for a reimbursable lunch include fruits, vegetables, grains, meats/meat alternates (M/MA), and fluid milk. These meal components must be present in the specified amounts to align with meal pattern requirements for reimbursement.

Schools are required to plan lunch and breakfast menus based on the grade groups K–5, 6–8, and 9–12. Specific meal component amounts and calorie levels are prescribed for each grade group to ensure the meals are nutritious and appropriate for the age group. Please consult your state agency contact if your district has an unusual grade configuration or service setting.

OVS is a concept that applies to menu planning and meal service. OVS allows students to choose food items, which means they may decline some foods offered in a reimbursable lunch or breakfast. Since students may choose fewer selections under OVS, guidance is provided on a reimbursable lunch and breakfast. To succeed at the point of service, schools are encouraged to conduct training for cashiers and serving line staff to help students select reimbursable lunches and breakfasts.

OVS aims to reduce food waste and allow students to choose their desired foods. Everyone plays a role. When students and cafeteria staff understand OVS, lunch lines move smoothly, allowing students to select and enjoy wholesome and appealing foods during their lunch period.

Before continuing, here is a review of important terms when discussing OVS:

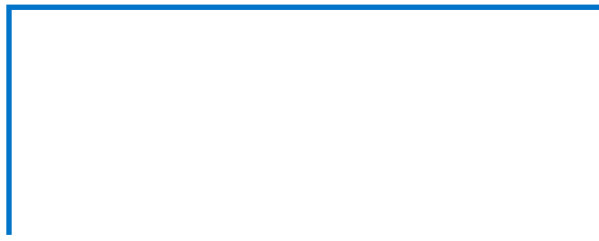
- A meal component is one of five required food groups in reimbursable lunches. These are fruits, vegetables, grains, M/MA, and fluid milk.
- A food item is a specific food offered within the five meal components. For example, spaghetti (whole grain-rich pasta with tomato sauce) is one food item that credits toward the grains and vegetables components.

OVS is required for lunches served in high schools but is optional in middle and elementary schools. OVS is not required for meals offered during field trips or other meals served away from the school campus.

Under OVS at lunch, all students at any grade level must select the following for a reimbursable meal:

- A minimum of three meal components
- At least one choice of these three must be  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup serving of fruit and/or vegetable.

## Notes



## Resources

Please note: Additional resources can be found starting on the next page; the activity handouts are after the additional resources.

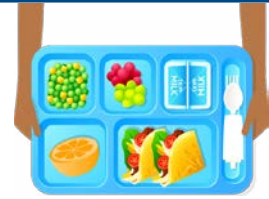


United States Department of Agriculture

Food and Nutrition Service

# OFFER VERSUS SERVE (OVS)

## Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers



### National School Lunch Program

#### What is OVS?

The goal of OVS is to reduce food waste and allow students to choose the foods they want to eat. Everyone plays a role. When students and cafeteria staff understand OVS, lunch lines move smoothly, allowing students to make the most of the lunch break and enjoy the wholesome and appealing foods they are served. It also helps reduce overall food costs.

Schools must offer all five food components in at least the minimum required quantities:

- A **food component** is one of five required food groups in reimbursable lunches. These are meats/meat alternates, grains, fruits, vegetables, and fluid milk\*.
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the five food components. For example, spaghetti (whole grain-rich pasta with tomato sauce) is one food item that contains a grain and a vegetable component.

Under OVS, students must select *three meal components* to ensure they get the nutritional benefits of a meal. OVS is required for lunches served in high schools, but is optional in middle and elementary schools. OVS is not required for meals offered as part of field trips or for any other meals served away from the school campus.

The required five food components must be offered for school lunch. Students must select at least three of the five required food components, including at least ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable, to have a reimbursable lunch. See the **Required Food Components** table for a listing of required food components and their minimum quantities that must be offered. Meats/meat alternates and grains are measured in ounce equivalents (oz eq is considered the amount of food product that is equal to 1 ounce).

**Required Food Components**

Required Food Component	Daily Minimum Requirements for Each Grade Level			
	K-5	6-8	K-8	9-12
Vegetables	¾ cup	¾ cup	¾ cup	1 cup
Fruits	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	1 cup
Grains	1 oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq	2 oz eq
Meats/Meat Alternates	1 oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq	2 oz eq
Fluid Milk*	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup

#### Is it Reimbursable?

Use this simple checklist to determine if student lunches are reimbursable under OVS:

- Does the meal offered to students include the minimum required amounts of vegetables, fruits, grains, meats/meat alternates, and fluid milk?
- Does the meal selected by the student contain at least three components, including at least ½ cup fruit and/or vegetable?

If the answer to each of these questions is yes, then the school lunch is reimbursable under OVS.

\*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

## Test Your OVS Skills!

Which combination of food items from the following offered lunch menu would make a reimbursable school lunch under OVS for Grades 9-12?

### Offered Lunch Menu

Food Item	Food Components
Hamburger on a whole grain-rich bun	2 oz eq grain 2 oz eq meat
½ cup corn	½ cup starchy vegetable
½ cup green beans	½ cup other vegetable
1 cup grapes	1 cup fruit
Variety of Low Fat/ Fat-Free Milk	1 cup fluid milk*

oz eq = ounce equivalent



### Which of the following student meals are reimbursable?

#### Meal 1:

½ cup of corn  
½ cup of green beans  
½ cup of grapes  
1 cup of milk\*



Reimbursable

Not Reimbursable

#### Meal 2:

Hamburger on whole grain-rich bun  
1 cup of milk\*



Reimbursable

Not Reimbursable

#### Meal 3:

Hamburger on whole grain-rich bun  
½ cup corn



Reimbursable

Not Reimbursable

**Answers:** Meals 1 and 3 are reimbursable meals under OVS. Meal 2 is not reimbursable because it does not include ½ cup fruit and/or vegetable.

\*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

## Additional Tips for OVS Success

- Post signage with pictures to help students identify how to build a reimbursable meal near the beginning of each serving line and wherever student choices are made.
- Have cashiers review the reimbursable meal signage before each meal service for greater success.
- Keep fruit near the cashier stand so students can easily complete their reimbursable meal.
- Encourage teachers to review the day's menu with students and explain how students can select a reimbursable meal.
- Post menus that highlight required meal components on your school's website and/or on flyers that children can take home to discuss with their parents and caregivers.

For more information on OVS requirements, visit:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16>



## Activity Handouts

## Fill-in-the-Blanks Lunch Meal Component

**Instructions:** Below are groups of health benefits and dietary roles associated with various meal components. Please read each group of descriptions and write the NSLP meal component that you think best matches the descriptions provided.

Meal Component: \_\_\_\_\_

- High in calcium and vitamin D, essential for bone health.
- Important for heart health and can provide essential fats.

Meal Component: \_\_\_\_\_

- Rich in protein, which helps in muscle building and repair.
- Contains iron and B vitamins, which are crucial for energy production and red blood cell formation.

Meal Component: \_\_\_\_\_

- Provides carbohydrates, the body's main source of energy, which is especially important for young, active students.
- Includes fiber-rich options that support healthy digestion and sustained energy levels.

Meal Component: \_\_\_\_\_

- A good source of vitamin C and can help boost the immune system.
- Often consumed fresh or as juice and known for high antioxidant content.

Meal Component: \_\_\_\_\_

- Rich in dietary fiber, which aids in digestion and supports a healthy gut.
- Includes a variety of colors and types, each offering different vitamins and minerals crucial for health.
- Listed as subgroups in the meal pattern requirements.

## Recognize an OVS Reimbursable NSLP Meal

**Instructions:** Below are photos of foods served for a school lunch. Please recognize if the tray includes what is needed to be a reimbursable meal under OVS in the NSLP. If not, list what to include to make the meal reimbursable. For the sake of the activity, assume these meals are being reviewed at the high school level (grades 9-12).

### TRAY EXAMPLE #1

Chicken Fried Rice

- 2 oz eq grains
- 1 oz eq meats/meat alternates
- 1/8 cup of vegetables

Banana

- 1/2 cup of fruits



Select one:      Meal or      No Meal

If not, why?

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### TRAY EXAMPLE #2

Fiesta Wrap

- 1 oz eq grains
- 1 oz eq meats/meat alternates

Milk

- 1 cup of milk



Select one:      Meal or      No Meal

If not, why?

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**TRAY EXAMPLE #3**

Apple

- ½ cup of fruits

Potatoes

- ½ cup of vegetables

Milk

- 1 cup of milk



Select one:      Meal or      No Meal

If not, why?

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**TRAY EXAMPLE #4**

Bean and Meat Chili

- 2 oz eq meats/meat alternates
- ¾ cup of vegetables

Roll

- 1 oz eq grains

Green Beans

- ½ cup of vegetables



Select one:      Meal or      No Meal

If not, why?

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**TRAY EXAMPLE #5**

Spaghetti with Meat Sauce

- 2 oz eq meats/meat alternates
- 2 oz eq grains
- ¼ cup of vegetables

Mixed Fruits

- ½ cup of fruits



Select one:      Meal or      No Meal

If not, why?

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# LESSON 2: REIMBURSABLE SCHOOL MEALS—BREAKFAST

## Introduction

Lesson 2: Reimbursable School Meals—Breakfast will engage in a comprehensive 45-minute session that covers the critical components of the School Breakfast Program (SBP). This lesson starts with a quick overview of the SBP's meal components, spanning various food items and grade group specifications. It moves into a detailed examination of how these components are planned, offered, and selected. The lesson further delves into categorizing these meal components according to the SBP meal patterns, including special considerations like vegetable substitutions for fruits. A substantial portion of the session is dedicated to understanding the Offer versus Serve (OVS) provision and its role in ensuring reimbursable breakfasts. Through interactive activities, discussions, and practical exercises, participants will learn to recognize and categorize foods effectively to ensure each meal served qualifies for federal reimbursement.

A meal component refers to one of the food groups that make up a reimbursable breakfast under the SBP. There are three required meal components at breakfast. Each meal component must be offered in at least the daily minimum required amounts, and where applicable, the weekly minimum amounts must also be met. The meal components for a reimbursable breakfast include fruits, combined grains and M/MA, and fluid milk. These meal components must be present in the specified amounts to align with meal pattern requirements for reimbursement.

A food item is a specific food offered in a reimbursable meal from the five meal components. Food items may include multiple choices from any required meal components and must be offered in the minimum quantity for the meal component to be credited. For example, separate  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup servings of peaches, applesauce, and pears are three food item choices that, when selected, comprise one meal component (fruit). Although three different food items are offered, all choices are from the same meal component (fruit).

A breakfast food item is a specific food offered in a reimbursable breakfast from the three meal components. For OVS, a school must offer at least four food items from the three required meal components (fruits, grains and/or meats/meat alternates, fluid milk).

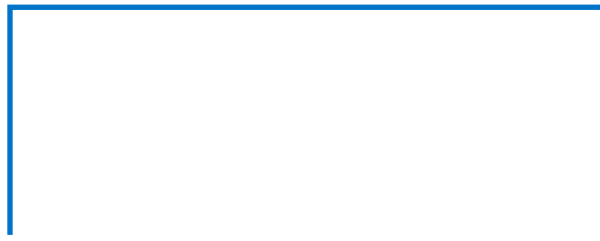
Schools are required to plan lunch and breakfast menus based on the grade groups K–5, 6–8, and 9–12. Specific meal component amounts and calorie levels are specified for each grade group to ensure the meals are nutritious and appropriate for the age group. Please consult your State agency contact if your district has an unusual grade configuration.

Under OVS at breakfast, at least four food items from the three required meal components (fruit, grains and/or meats/meat alternates, and fluid milk) must be offered. Remember, food items are individual foods and may credit toward one or more meal component. All students at any grade level must select:

- At least three food items
- At least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruit and/or vegetables

Except for the requirement to select a  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruit and/or vegetable, the student chooses to select or decline food items, as long as at least three food items are taken. The menu planner determines how to offer food items, which may affect a student's selections to build a reimbursable breakfast. Remember, the cashier is responsible for following the intent of the menu and ensuring students select a reimbursable meal.

## Notes



## Resources

Please note: Additional resources can be found starting on the next page; the activity handouts are after the additional resources.



United States Department of Agriculture

Food and Nutrition Service

# OFFER VERSUS SERVE (OVS)

## Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers



### School Breakfast Program

#### What is OVS?

The goal of OVS is to reduce food waste while allowing students to choose the foods they want to eat. Everyone plays a role. When students and cafeteria staff understand OVS, breakfast lines move smoothly, allowing students to make the most of meal time and enjoy the wholesome and appealing foods they are served. It also helps reduce overall food costs.

Under OVS at breakfast, schools must offer at least four food items from the three required food components (fruit, grains, and fluid milk\*).

- A **food component** is one of three required food groups in a reimbursable breakfast. These are fruits, grains, and fluid milk\*.
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the three food components, for example, 2 slices of whole grain-rich bread, 1 cup of grapes, and 1 cup of milk. This meal meets OVS breakfast requirements because three food components and four food items are offered.

Students must select at least three of the four offered food items under OVS at breakfast, including at least ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable. Please note, OVS is optional at breakfast for all grade levels.

#### Required Components at Breakfast

**Fruit**

1 cup

**Grains**1 ounce equivalent  
(oz eq)**Fluid Milk\***

1 cup

#### Sample OVS breakfast menu:

Variety of milk\*: fat free or low-fat (1 cup milk)  
 Slice of whole grain-rich toast (1 oz eq grain)  
 Whole grain-rich cereal (1 oz eq grain)  
 Orange slices (1 cup fruit)

#### Optional Components at Breakfast

##### Vegetables

- Vegetables may be offered as a substitute for fruits.

##### Meats/Meat Alternates

- A meat/meat alternate may be served to meet the weekly grain requirement, as long as a 1 oz eq minimum of grains is offered daily.
- A meat/meat alternate may also be offered as an "extra" food (not credited toward meal pattern requirements) if a reimbursable meal is selected.

\*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

## Is it Reimbursable?

For a breakfast to be reimbursable, at least four food items must be offered. Students must select three food items including ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable for the meal to be reimbursable under OVS.

**Use this simple checklist to determine if breakfasts are reimbursable under OVS:**

- Does the meal offered consist of at least four food items?
- Does the meal offered include the minimum required amounts of fruits, grains, and milk\*?
- Does the meal selected by the student contain at least three food items, including at least ½ cup fruit and/or vegetable?



If the answer to each of these questions is yes, the breakfast meal is reimbursable under OVS.

\*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

## Additional Tips for OVS Success

- Post signage (with pictures or graphics) near the beginning of each serving line to help students identify how to build a reimbursable meal and wherever student choices are made.
- Ask cashiers to review the reimbursable meal signage before each meal service.
- Keep fruit near the cashier stand so students can easily complete their reimbursable meal.
- Encourage teachers to review the day's menu with students and explain how students can select a reimbursable meal.
- Post menus that highlight required meal components on your school's website and/or on flyers that children can take home to discuss with their parents and caregivers.

For more information on OVS requirements, visit:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16>

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## Activity Handouts

## Fill-in-the-Blanks Breakfast Meal Component

**Instructions:** Below are groups of health benefits and dietary roles associated with various meal components. Please read each group of descriptions and write the SBP meal component that you think best matches the descriptions provided.

Q1: For the following definition, what is it describing? \_\_\_\_\_

- One of the three required groups of reimbursable meals. The three required at breakfast to be offered to students are fluid milk, fruits, and combined grains and M/MA.

Q2: For the following definition, what is it describing? \_\_\_\_\_

- A specific food is offered within the three required meal components for breakfast: fluid milk, fruits, and combined grains and M/MA.

**The following are the three required meal components for the SBP.**

Q3: Meal component: \_\_\_\_\_

- High in calcium and vitamin D, essential for bone health.
- Important for heart health and can provide essential fats.

Q4: Meal component: \_\_\_\_\_

- Provides carbohydrates, the body's main source of energy, which is especially important for young, active students.
- Includes fiber-rich options that support healthy digestion and sustained energy levels.

Q5: Meal component: \_\_\_\_\_

- A good source of vitamin C and can help boost the immune system.
- Often consumed fresh or as juice and known for high antioxidant content.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (no subgroup requirement) may be substituted.

## Recognize an OVS Reimbursable SBP Meal

**Instructions:** Below are photos of foods served for a school breakfast. Please recognize if the tray includes what is needed to be a reimbursable meal under OVS in the SBP. If not, list what to include to make the meal reimbursable. For the sake of the activity, assume these meals are being reviewed at the high school level (grades 9–12).

### TRAY EXAMPLE #1

Breakfast potatoes (1 food item each  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup serving)

- 2– $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of combined fruits/vegetables

Banana (1 food item)

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruits

Select one:      Meal or      No Meal

If not, why?



### TRAY EXAMPLE #2

Breakfast Vegetable Quesadilla (2 food items)

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of combined fruits/vegetables
- 2.5 oz eq combined grains and meats/meat alternates

Select one:      Meal or      No Meal

If not, why?



# Recognize an OVS Reimbursable SBP Meal

## TRAY EXAMPLE #3

Whole Grain Bagel (2 food items)

- 2 oz eq combined grains and meats/meat alternates

Milk (1 food item)

- 1 cup of milk

Select one:      Meal or      No Meal

If not, why?




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## TRAY EXAMPLE #4

Hard Boiled Egg (1 food item)

- 1 oz eq combined grains and meats/meat alternates

Apple (1 food item)

- 1 cup of fruits

Milk (1 food item)

- 1 cup of milk

Select one:      Meal or      No Meal

If not, why?




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# APPENDIX

## Key Terms

Key Terms	Definition
as purchased (AP)	The form(s) in which a food is purchased.
combined grains and meats/meat alternates (M/MA) component	A merged meal component for the school breakfast meal pattern that includes grains, meat/meat alternates, or a combination of both.
child nutrition (CN) labeling program	<p>A program that provides manufacturers the option to include a standardized food crediting statement on their product labels. CN Labels must be authorized by USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) prior to being used. Manufacturers must have an approved quality control (QC) program and inspection oversight that meet FNS, Child Nutrition Programs requirements. CN Labeled products are generally purchased by providers for USDA meal programs. Benefits of CN Labels are that they clearly identify the contributions of the product toward the meal pattern requirement and provide a warranty against audit claims if the CN Label is used according to the manufacturer's directions.</p> <p>It is important to know the CN Logo (the box with CN on each side that surrounds the meal pattern contribution statement) is one of the four integral parts of a label. The CN Logo must include the weight of the serving, the CN crediting statement, authorization statement, the approval date, and the six-digit identification number. The other three integral parts are the product name, ingredient statement, and inspection legend. All four parts must be on the product carton in order for the CN Label to be valid.</p>
creditable (and non-creditable)	If a food contributes (or credits) toward a meal component (fluid milk, grains, meats/meat alternates, fruits, or vegetables) in the Child Nutrition Programs, then it is creditable. The Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs provides crediting information for all meal components. Food items that do not contribute toward the meal components are non-creditable.
cycle menu	A series of menus that is repeated over a specific period of time, such as 4 weeks.
daily required minimum serving amount	The minimum amount of a food needed to meet the meal pattern requirement in a specific meal. Amounts required are specified by meal components for each meal pattern and by age/grade group.
Dietary Guidelines for Americans	The cornerstone document of Federal nutrition policy and nutrition education activities, providing food-based recommendations to promote health, help prevent diet-related disease, and meet nutrient needs. The US Department of Health and Human Services and USDA jointly publish the <i>Dietary Guidelines</i> every five years.

Key Terms	Definition
edible portion (ep)	The amount of a food that can actually be eaten after trimming and cooking.
enriched grains	Refined grains that have been processed in a way that removes the nutrient-rich bran and germ, then have thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folic acid, and iron added after processing, as required by the Federal standard of identity for products labeled as “enriched.”
fluid milk component	The meal component in Nutrition Standards for School Meals that includes pasteurized unflavored or flavored fat-free and 1% (low-fat) milk.
Food and Nutrition Service (FNS)	The agency under the United States Department of Agriculture responsible for administering the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, Special Milk, and other nutrition and food assistance programs.
food-based menu planning (FBMP)	The method for meal planning for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program that includes required quantities from specific meal components for daily and weekly meal patterns. These components are fluid milk, fruits, vegetables (including subgroups), grains, and meats/meat alternates. Minimum portion sizes are established by age and grade groups.
Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (FBG)	The authoritative guide developed by USDA to help child nutrition professionals determine purchase amounts of foods for crediting meal components in food-based menu planning. The FBG and related resources are available at <a href="https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutritionprograms">https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutritionprograms</a>
food item	A specific food offered within the five meal components: fruits, vegetables, grains, meats/meat alternates, and fluid milk. For example, a hamburger patty on a bun is one food item with two of the five meal components (meats/meat alternates and grains).
fruits component	The meal component in Nutrition Standards for School Meals that is comprised of fruits (fresh, frozen, canned, dried, and pasteurized full-strength juice). Up to half of fruit offerings may be in the form of full-strength juice.
grade group (age/grade group)	USDA-established groupings used for menu planning that reflect the grade structure of the majority of schools: K–5 (ages 5–10), 6–8 (ages 11–13), and 9–12 (ages 14–18).
grains component	The meal component in Nutrition Standards for School Meals that is comprised of cereal grains and products made from their flours. 80% of foods credited toward grains in school meals must be whole grain-rich, and the remaining 20% must be enriched.
main dish (entrée)	<p>An item that is served as the main dish and is either:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A combination food of meat and/or meat alternates and grains; or</li> <li>• A combination food of vegetables and/or fruit and meat and/or meat alternates; or</li> <li>• A meat or meat alternate alone with the exception of yogurt, low-fat or reduced-fat cheese, nuts, seeds, nut or seed butters, and meat snacks (such as dried beef jerky); or</li> <li>• A grain that is served as the main dish of the School Breakfast Program reimbursable meal.</li> </ul>

Key Terms	Definition
meal component	One of the five food categories that make up a reimbursable meal or snack according to USDA meal pattern requirements. The five meal components are: fluid milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats/meat alternates (M/MA).
meats/meat alternates component	The meal component in Nutrition Standards for School Meals that includes meats (beef, pork, poultry, fish, etc.) and meat alternates, such as eggs, cheese, yogurt, beans and peas (legumes), nuts, and seeds.
minimum creditable amount	The smallest portion of a food that contributes toward a meal component.
MyPlate	MyPlate is the current consumer-focused nutrition guide published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion and is based on the scientific findings and recommendations in the <i>Dietary Guidelines for Americans</i> .
National School Lunch Program (NSLP)	The program authorized under the National School Lunch Act that allows participating schools to operate a nonprofit lunch program in accordance with 7 CFR 210. General and special cash assistance and donated food assistance are made available to schools in accordance with 7 CFR 210.
Offer versus Serve (OVS)	A provision in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program that allows students to decline some of the food offered. The goals of OVS are to reduce food waste in the school meals programs while permitting students to decline foods they do not intend to eat.
ounce equivalent (oz eq)	Ounce equivalents (oz eq) are used to demonstrate the amount of grains or meats/meat alternates in a portion of food. Food items that contribute toward the grains and meats/meat alternates components in Child Nutrition Programs are credited based on oz eq.
product formulation statement (PFS)	A document that provides specific information about a food product and shows how the food credits toward the child nutrition meal pattern citing Child Nutrition Program resources and/or regulations.
recognizable food item	A recognizable food is a food item visible in the breakfast or lunch offered that allows students to identify the food groups and amounts recommended for consumption at mealtime. Except for noodles made from bean or legume flours that credit toward the vegetable component, foods must be recognizable to be creditable in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.
reimbursable meal	A meal served to a participant of the Child Nutrition Programs that meets the meal pattern requirements, such a meal that qualifies for reimbursement with Federal funds.
School Breakfast Program (SBP)	The program authorized by Section 4 of the Child Nutrition Act of 1966, which provides meals to children in the morning hours served at or close to the beginning of the child's day at school that meet the nutritional requirements set out in 7 CFR 220.8.
School Food Authority (SFA)	The governing body responsible for the administration of one or more schools and has the legal authority to operate Federal school meal programs therein or is otherwise approved by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to operate Federal school meal programs.
school week	The period of time used to determine compliance with the meal requirements.

Key Terms	Definition
State agency (SA)	The State educational agency or any other agency of the State that has been designated by the Governor or other appropriate executive or legislative authority of the State and approved by the Department to administer the program in schools, as specified in 7 CFR 210.3(b); or the Food and Nutrition Service Regional Office (FNSRO), where the FNSRO administers the program as specified in 7 CFR 210.3(c).
Team Nutrition (TN)	An initiative of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to support the Child Nutrition Programs through training and technical assistance for food service, nutrition education for children and their caregivers, and school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)	The Federal entity designated by Congress to administer the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, and Special Milk Programs.
vegetable subgroups	The five categories of vegetables within the vegetables component required in school lunches across the menu week: dark green, red/orange, beans, peas, and lentils, starchy, and other vegetables.
vegetables component	The meal component in Nutrition Standards for School Meals is comprised of vegetables (fresh, frozen, canned, dried, pasteurized full-strength juice) and includes five subgroups (see vegetable subgroups). Up to half of vegetable offerings may be in the form of full-strength juice.
whole grain-rich	The term designated by FNS to indicate that the grain content of a product is between 50 and 100 percent whole grain with any remaining grains being enriched.
whole grains	Grains that consist of the intact, ground, cracked, or flaked grain seed whose principal anatomical components—the starchy endosperm, germ, and bran—are present in the same relative proportions as they exist in the intact grain seed.

## Resources

- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2024). Crediting tip sheets in child nutrition programs.  
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/crediting-tip-sheets-child-nutrition-programs>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. (2024). National school lunch program meal pattern chart.  
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## References

Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020–2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 7 C.F.R § 210, 215, 220, 225, 226 (2024).

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/25/2024-08098/child-nutrition-programs-meal-patterns-consistent-with-the-2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-for>

Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, 7 C.F.R. § 210, 220 (2012).

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2012/01/26/2012-1010/nutrition-standards-in-the-national-school-lunch-and-school-breakfast-programs>



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