

Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program

This guidance helps menu planners meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal pattern requirements for grades K-12 (including the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP) and encourage student selections of reimbursable meals with offer versus serve (OVS). The NSLP meal patterns are available on the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. For information on the NSLP meal patterns for preschoolers (ages 1-4), visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.



Meal pattern: All lunch menus must meet minimum daily and weekly requirements. The weekly maximums for the grains component and meat/meat alternates component are not required but school food authorities (SFAs) should use them as a planning tool to assist in offering balanced meals that meet the weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium. For more information, see the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and the CSDE's guide, *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12*.



Milk: The lunch meal pattern allows low-fat (1%) milk (unflavored or flavored) and fat-free (unflavored or flavored) milk. SFAs must offer at least 1 cup daily for all grades, and must include a variety of milk, i.e., at least two different choices. At least one choice must be unflavored low-fat or fat-free milk.



Fruits: The fruits component includes fresh fruit, frozen fruit, dried fruit, and canned fruit in light syrup, water, or juice. SFAs must offer at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 1 cup daily for grades 9-12. All fruits credit based on the volume served except dried fruit, which credits as twice the volume served. For example, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of dried fruit credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the fruits component. A serving of canned fruit can include the juice in which it is packed.



Vegetables: The vegetables component includes fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables. SFAs must offer at least $\frac{3}{4}$ cup daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 1 cup daily for grades 9-12. All vegetables credit based on volume except raw leafy greens such as spinach and lettuce, which credit as half the volume served. For example, 1 cup of raw leafy greens credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the vegetables component. The meal pattern serving size refers to the amount of vegetables without added liquid, such as the water in canned corn or the sauce in baked beans. Menus must include minimum weekly amounts of five vegetable subgroups: dark green, red/orange, beans/peas (legumes), starchy, and other. For more information, see the CSDE's handout, *Vegetable Subgroups in the NSLP*.

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Juice: Fruit and vegetable juice must be pasteurized 100 percent full-strength juice. Fruit juice cannot exceed half of the weekly fruit offerings and vegetable juice cannot exceed half of the weekly vegetable offerings. For example, if the weekly lunch menu for grades 6-8 includes 2 ½ cups of fruit, fruit juice cannot exceed 1 ¼ cups. The juice limit applies all sources of 100 percent juice served at lunch during the week, including 100 percent juice, frozen juice pops made from 100 percent juice, pureed fruits and vegetables in fruit/vegetable smoothies, and juice from canned fruit served in 100 percent juice (unless the canned fruit is drained). For more information, see the CSDE's handouts, *Crediting Juice for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP* and *Crediting Smoothies for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP*.



Grains: SFAs must offer at least 1 ounce equivalent (oz eq) daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 2 oz eq daily for grades 9-12. Over the week, five-day menus must include at least 8 oz eq for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 10 oz eq for grades 9-12. Seven-day menus must include at least 11 oz eq for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 14 oz eq for grades 9-12. At least half of the weekly grains offered at lunch must be WGR. Grains that are not WGR must be enriched. WGR foods contain at least 50 percent whole grains, any remaining grains are enriched, and any noncreditable grains are less than 2 percent (¼ ounce equivalent) of the product formula. WGR foods include 100 percent whole grains, which are the most nutritious choices. For more information, see the CSDE's handouts, *Whole Grain-rich Criteria for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP* and *Crediting Whole Grains in the NSLP and SBP*.



Meat/meat alternates: SFAs must offer at least 1 oz eq daily for grades K-5 and 6-8, and at least 2 oz eq daily for grades 9-12. Over the week, five-day menus must include at least 8 oz eq for grades K-5, at least 9 oz eq for grades 6-8, and at least 10 oz eq for grades 9-12. Seven-day menus must include at least 11 oz eq for grades K-5, at least 12.5 oz eq for 6-8, and at least 14 oz eq for grades 9-12. A 1-oz eq serving of the meat/meat alternates component equals 1 ounce of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish; 1 ounce of cheese (low-fat recommended); ¼ cup of cooked beans and peas (legumes); ½ large egg; 2 tablespoons of nut butters; 1 ounce of nuts or seeds; ¼ cup of commercial tofu; ½ cup of yogurt or soy yogurt; and 1 ounce of alternate protein products (APP). Meat/meat alternates must be served in a main dish or a main dish and only one other food item. For more information on the meat/meat alternates component, see the CSDE's handouts, *Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP*, *Crediting Deli Meats in the NSLP and SBP*, *Crediting Legumes in the NSLP and SBP*, *Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the NSLP and SBP*, *Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the NSLP and SBP*, and *Requirements for Alternate Protein Products*.

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Dietary specifications: Lunch menus must meet the weekly dietary specifications (nutrition standards) for calories, saturated fat, and sodium indicated in the NSLP meal pattern. In addition, the nutrition label or manufacturer specifications for all foods and ingredients used in school meals must indicate zero grams of trans fat per serving. For information on the dietary specifications, see section 6 of the CSDE’s *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12*. SFAs should be aware of product nutrition information and limit noncreditable foods. For more information, see the CSDE’s handout, *Noncreditable Foods for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP*.



Offer versus serve (OVS): SFAs must offer all five components (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meat/meat alternates). Students must select at least three components, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum daily serving of at least two other components. Except for the fruits and vegetables components, amounts less than the minimum serving do not credit as a food component for OVS. For more information, see the CSDE’s guide, *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*.



Offering variety: The language used on school menus and signs must indicate if choices are allowed. To offer variety, provide different choices and specify the number of items students can select. The lunch menu below provides an example.

Sample lunch menu (grades 9-12)			
<p>Each lunch includes five components: milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meat/meat alternates. Choose at least one fruit or vegetable and two other components.</p>			
	<p style="color: green; font-weight: bold;">Choose at least one serving (½ cup)</p>		
Milk	Fruits	Vegetables	Meat/meat alternates and grains *
Choose 1	Choose 1	Choose up to 2	Choose 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low-fat (1%) Fat-free plain Fat-free chocolate Fat-free strawberry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raisins Blueberries Green grapes Pineapple chunks Sliced peaches Banana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrot sticks Broccoli florets Spinach salad Seasoned corn Roasted potatoes Green beans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hamburger on whole-wheat bun Turkey whole-grain wrap Baked chicken with whole grain-rich corn bread Southwest chili with whole-grain roll
<p>* All entrees include grains and meat/meat alternates (two components).</p>			

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Signage and communication: SFAs must identify all foods that are part of reimbursable meals near or at the beginning of all serving lines, and on the serving line near each food component, as applicable. For example, if fruits are offered in ½-cup portions for grades 9-12, the serving line signage must indicate that students can select two choices. To ensure clear communication with students and staff about the NSLP meal pattern and OVS, SFAs must post daily lunch menus in all schools that clearly communicate all menu choices and what students are allowed to select. SFAs must also provide adequate training for school food service staff on the lunch meal pattern, including how to recognize reimbursable lunches with OVS.

Resources

Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditMMA.pdf>

Comparison of Meal Pattern Requirements for the Grains Component in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE): <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/ComparisonGrainCrediting.pdf>

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/ComparisonGrainCrediting.pdf>

Comparison of Meal Pattern Requirements for the Milk Component in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE): <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/ComparisonMilkRequirements.pdf>

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/ComparisonMilkRequirements.pdf>

Crediting Deli Meats in the NSLP and SBP: Crediting Deli Meats in the NSLP and SBP:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Creditdeli.pdf>

Crediting Juice for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditJuice.pdf>

Crediting Legumes in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditLegumes.pdf>

Crediting Smoothies for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditSmoothie.pdf>

Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the NSLP and SBP:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditTofu.pdf>

Crediting Whole Grains in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/CreditWholeGrains.pdf>

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 07-19: Compliance Issues with the Vegetables and Fruits Components for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Memos/OM2019/OM07-19.pdf>

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 06-19: Summary of Federal and State Milk Requirements for the NSLP, SBP, SSO of the NSLP, ASP of the NSLP, and Special Milk Program (SMP):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Memos/OM2019/OM07-19.pdf>

Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the NSLP

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Patterns-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Menu Planning for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE website):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning>

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning-Guide-for-School-Meals>

Menu Planning Resources for School Meals (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Menu-Planning>

National School Lunch Program (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/National-School-Lunch-Program>

Noncreditable Foods for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/NoncredSNP.pdf>

Nutrition Standards for School Meals (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>

Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Offer-versus-Serve-for-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/OVS/OVSGuide.pdf>

Portion Guide for Fresh Fruits (Start with Half a Cup):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/SWHAC/PortionGuideFruit85x14.pdf>

Portion Guide for Fresh Vegetables (Start with Half a Cup):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/SWHAC/PortionGuideVeg85x14.pdf>

School Meals: Tools for Schools (USDA webpage):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/tools-schools>

USDA Final Rule: Child Nutrition Programs: Flexibilities for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Requirements (83 FR 63775):

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2018-12-12/pdf/2018-26762.pdf>

Vegetable Subgroups in the NSLP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/VegSubgroup.pdf>

Whole Grain-rich Criteria for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/WGRCriteria.pdf>

Whole Grain-rich Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Grainsozeq.pdf>

Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the NSLP



For more information, review the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) guide, *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12*, and visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpages, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) in the CSDE's Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/MealPattern/MenuPlanningNSLP.pdf>.

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