

Five-day Week Lunch Menu Planning Checklist for Grades K-5

School Year 2025-26 (July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026)

This checklist assists school food authorities (SFAs) with planning meals to meet the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\) five-day meal pattern for grades K-5](#). For information on the NSLP meal patterns, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) resources, [Overview of Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program](#) and [Guide to the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#), and visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. For information on the crediting requirements, visit the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and [Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

SFAs must serve at least the minimum daily and weekly amount of each meal component. Larger amounts may be offered if the weekly lunch menu does not exceed the weekly [dietary specifications](#) for calories, saturated fat, and sodium.

Instructions: Check (X) each box below to indicate if the lunch menu complies with each requirement. If any boxes are not checked, review the lunch menu and revise accordingly to ensure it complies with the NSLP meal pattern requirements.

Lunch

- ☐ Each lunch includes the five meal components: meats/meat alternates, grains, fruits, vegetables, and milk.

Meats/Meat Alternates (MMA) Component

- ☐ Each lunch includes at least 1 ounce equivalent (oz eq) of MMA.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least 8 oz eq of MMA.
- ☐ The MMA is served in a main dish, or a main dish and one other item.

For guidance on the MMA component, visit the "[Meats and Meat Alternates](#)" section of the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Grains Component

- ☐ Each lunch includes at least 1 oz eq of grains.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least 8 oz eq of grains.

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- ☐ At least 80 percent of the grain menu items offered during the week are whole grain-rich (WGR), based on the total oz eq of all offered grains. The remaining grain menu items are enriched and do not exceed 20 percent.
- ☐ Grain-based desserts do not exceed 2 oz eq per week.

For guidance on the grains component, visit the [“Grains”](#) section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Fruits Component

- ☐ Each lunch includes at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups of fruit.
- ☐ Fruit juices are 100 percent juice and do not exceed half of the weekly offered fruits. *Indicate “NA” (not applicable) if the menu does not include fruit juices.*
- ☐ Dried fruits are credited as twice the amount served, i.e., $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of raisins credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the fruits component.

For guidance on the fruits component, visit the [“Fruits”](#) section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Vegetables Component

- ☐ Each meal includes at least $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of vegetables.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least $3\frac{3}{4}$ cups of vegetables.
 - ☐ The weekly lunch menu provides all five vegetable subgroups:
 - ☐ **Dark green:** at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup is offered weekly
 - ☐ **Red/orange:** at least $\frac{3}{4}$ cup is offered weekly
 - ☐ **Beans, peas, and lentils:** at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup is offered weekly
 - ☐ **Starchy:** at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup is offered weekly
 - ☐ **Other:** at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup is offered weekly (or dark green, red/orange, beans/peas/lentils, or starchy)
 - ☐ At least 1 cup of **additional vegetables** are offered weekly (may be from any of the five vegetable subgroups)
- ☐ Vegetable juices are 100 percent juice and do not exceed half of the weekly offered vegetables. *Indicate “NA” if the menu does not include vegetable juices.*
- ☐ Raw leafy greens are credited as half of the amount served, i.e., 1 cup of lettuce or spinach credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the vegetables component.

For guidance on the vegetables component, visit the [“Vegetables”](#) section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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Milk Component

- ☐ Each lunch includes at least 1 cup of milk.
- ☐ The weekly lunch menu includes at least 5 cups of milk.
- ☐ Milk is low-fat (1%) or fat-free, unflavored or flavored.
- ☐ At least two different varieties of milk are offered, including at least one unflavored choice.

For guidance on the milk component, visit the [“Milk”](#) section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Offer versus Serve (OVS)

Indicate “NA” if the school does not implement OVS.

- ☐ Students select at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable for a reimbursable meal.
- ☐ In addition to at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable, students select the full portion of at least two other components for a reimbursable meal.

For guidance on OVS, refer to the CSDE’s [Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals](#) and visit the CSDE’s [Offer versus Serve for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Dietary Specifications (Nutrition Standards) for Weekly Menus

Note: SFAs are not required to conduct a nutrient analysis of menus. If applicable, the CSDE will conduct a nutrient analysis during the [Administrative Review](#) of the school nutrition programs. *Indicate “NK” (not known) if the SFA does not conduct a nutrient analysis.*

- ☐ Calories are within the allowable range of 550-650 calories.
- ☐ Saturated fat is less than 10 percent of total calories.
- ☐ Sodium does not exceed 1,110 milligrams (target 1A through June 30, 2027).

For guidance on the dietary specifications, refer to the CSDE’s [Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#) and visit the [“Dietary Specifications”](#) section of the CSDE’s Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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Menu Planning Resources

Calculating the Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/calculate_wgr_percentage_snp.pdf

Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs>

Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs>

Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/credit_grain_based_desserts_grades_k-12_snp.pdf

Crediting Summary Charts for the Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/crediting_summary_charts_snp.pdf

Dietary Specifications (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Program webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs/dietary-specifications>

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-for-child-nutrition-programs>

Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/grain_oz_eq_snp.pdf

Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/wgr_requirement_snp_grades_k-12.pdf

Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_menu_documentation_snp.pdf

Guide to the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_meal_patterns_nslp_sbp_k12.pdf

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Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/meal_pattern/resources_school_meal_patterns_snp.pdf

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 Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning-guidance-for-school-meals>

Offer versus Serve for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/offer-versus-serve-for-school-nutrition-programs>

Overview of Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/overview_menu_planning_nslp_grades_k-12.pdf

Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/program-guidance-school-nutrition-programs>

Sodium Limits for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/sodium_limits_nslp_sbp.pdf

Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/vegetable_subgroups_nslp.pdf

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage and [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/nslp_menu_checklist_5day_grades_K-5.pdf.

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
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3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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