

Offer versus Serve in At-Risk Afterschool Centers in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

This guidance applies to at-risk afterschool centers that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Child and Adult Care Food Program \(CACFP\)](#).

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Overview of OVS Requirements

The USDA final rule, [Child and Adult Care Food Program: Meal Pattern Revisions Related to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#), authorized offer versus serve (OVS) for ages 6-18 in at-risk afterschool programs, effective October 1, 2017. OVS is an optional approach to menu planning and meal service that allows children to decline some of the foods offered in a reimbursable breakfast, lunch, or supper. OVS is not allowed at snack.

OVS at breakfast

For a reimbursable breakfast with OVS, the at-risk afterschool center must offer the full serving of at least four food items from the three meal components (milk, vegetables/fruits, and grains) required by the [CACFP Breakfast Meal Pattern for Children](#). Children must select the full serving of at least three food items.

OVS at lunch and supper

For a reimbursable lunch or supper with OVS, the at-risk afterschool center must offer the full serving of the five meal components (milk, vegetables, fruits, grains, and meats/meat alternates [MMA]) required by the [CACFP Lunch/Supper Meal Pattern for Children](#). Children must select the full serving of at least three components.

If a National School Lunch Program (NSLP) sponsor operates the CACFP at-risk afterschool meals program and follows the NSLP meal pattern for grades K-12, the NSLP OVS requirements apply. The NSLP OVS requirements for grades K-12 are different from the CACFP OVS requirements. For more information, refer to the CSDE's [Offer Versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Required CSDE approval

CACFP at-risk afterschool programs that choose to implement OVS must notify the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [CACFP staff](#) and receive approval prior to beginning implementation. CACFP menus and meal service must follow all OVS requirements.

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Meal Components and Food Items

The determination of reimbursable meals under OVS is based on the child's selection of the full serving of a minimum number of meal components (lunch and supper) or food items (breakfast).

- A **meal component** is one of the food groups that comprise a reimbursable meal. The CACFP breakfast meal pattern requires three meal components (milk, vegetables/fruits, and grains). The CACFP lunch and supper meal pattern requires five meal components (milk, MMA, vegetables, fruits, and grains).
 - Milk for ages 13-18 must be low-fat (1%) or fat-free, either unflavored or flavored. The USDA's [CACFP best practices](#) recommends only unflavored milk.
 - Grains must be whole grain rich (WGR) or enriched. At least one serving per day must be WGR (refer to the CSDE's [Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#)). Grain menu items must meet the required weights (groups A-E) or volumes (groups H-I) in the CSDE's resource, [Grain Ounce Equivalents for the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#) or provide the minimum creditable grains per serving (refer to the CSDE's resource, [Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents in the Child and Adult Care Food Program](#)).
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the five meal components. For example, a hamburger on a whole-grain bun is one food item that contains two meal components (grains and MMA). A ½-cup serving of applesauce and a ½-cup serving of blueberries are two food items from the fruits component. A 1-cup serving of brown rice and a 2-ounce whole-grain bagel are two food items from the grains component.
- The **full serving** is the minimum amount required for each age group in the CACFP meal patterns for children.

CACFP menus may provide the required meal components as single food items (such as chicken, pasta, fruit, and vegetables) or combination foods. Combination foods contain more than one meal component, such as sandwiches, pizza, and smoothies made with yogurt and pureed fruit. For example, macaroni and cheese contains pasta (grains component) and cheese (MMA component). Combination foods generally cannot be separated (such as burritos and pizza) or are not intended to be separated (such as a hamburger on a bun or a turkey sandwich).



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Signage

If the CACFP menu offers combination foods, or two or more food items from one food component (such as bread and rice), the at-risk afterschool center must provide instructions or signage about the OVS requirements. This signage must indicate what choices make up a reimbursable meal and let children know that they cannot select two of the same food items (breakfast) or meal components (lunch and supper). The examples below illustrate this requirement.

- A child cannot select milk and two pieces of toast for a reimbursable breakfast because this choice provides only two food items (milk and grains). A reimbursable breakfast must always contain at least three food items.
- A child cannot select two servings of chicken and one serving of rice for a reimbursable lunch because this choice provides only two meal components (MMA component and grains component). A reimbursable lunch or supper must always contain at least three meal components.



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OVS at Breakfast

The CACFP at-risk afterschool center must offer the full serving of at least four food items from the three meal components (milk, vegetables/fruits, and grains). The four food items cannot include two servings of milk.

Breakfast menus cannot include two servings of the same food item. For example, a breakfast menu that offers a serving of milk, a serving of banana, and two servings of toast (such as one slice of enriched cinnamon-raisin bread and one slice of whole-wheat bread) is not reimbursable because the two servings of toast are the same food item (grains component).

Children must select the full serving of at least three food items for a reimbursable meal. Children can decline any one food item. Table 1 summarizes the requirements for OVS at breakfast.

Table 1. OVS breakfast requirements for CACFP at-risk afterschool centers

Center must offer at least four food items	Child must select
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Milk, 1 cup2. Vegetables/fruits, ½ cup3. Grains, 2 ounce equivalents (oz eq)4. MMA (1 oz eq) or additional serving of vegetables/fruits (½ cup) or additional serving of grains (1 oz eq)	At least three different food items (children may decline any one food item)

Menu planning guidance for breakfast

Breakfasts in at-risk afterschool centers must meet the criteria below to be reimbursable under OVS.

- Larger servings of the same component count as only one food item for OVS. For example, 1 cup of strawberries counts as one food item (vegetables/fruits component). A 3-ounce whole-wheat bagel or two servings of whole-grain toast each count as one food item (grains component).

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- If the breakfast menu offers the full serving of a meal component as two separate food items, children must take both food items to count as one food item for OVS. The examples below illustrate this requirement.
 - The CACFP breakfast meal pattern for ages 6-18 requires $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the vegetables/fruits component. If the breakfast menu offers $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of sliced peaches and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of pineapple tidbits, children must select both food items to count as one food item (vegetables/fruits component) for OVS.
 - The CACFP breakfast meal pattern for ages 6-18 requires 1 oz eq of the grains component. If the breakfast menu offers $\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq of whole-grain cereal and 1 oz eq of a whole-grain muffin, children must select both food items to count as one food item (grains component) for OVS.
- Amounts less than a full serving do not count as a food item for OVS. For example, a selection of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of cantaloupe does not count as a food item because the required breakfast meal pattern serving is $\frac{1}{2}$ cup.
- Children may decline any one of the four food items, including milk.
- If the breakfast menu includes four food items, two of which are in a combination food, children cannot decline the combination food. For example, a breakfast menu includes a whole-grain muffin, milk, and a yogurt-fruit smoothie (combination food that contains the MMA component and vegetables/fruits component). Children must select the smoothie (two food items) and one other food item for a reimbursable breakfast.



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Examples of OVS at Breakfast

The examples below show how to implement OVS at breakfast. The at-risk afterschool center must offer the full serving of at least four food items. For a reimbursable breakfast, children must select the full serving of at least three different food items.

Example 1: Breakfast menu with four food items

Breakfast meal pattern for OVS	Planned menu	Food items
Grains (G), 1 oz eq	Whole-grain bagel, 2 ounces	1 G ¹
Vegetables and Fruits (VF), ½ cup	Strawberries, ½ cup	1 VF
Milk (M), 1 cup	Unflavored low-fat milk, 1 cup	1 M
MMA (1 oz eq) or additional VF (½ cup) or G (1 oz eq)	Orange slices, ½ cup	1 VF

¹ Larger servings of the same food count as only one food item for OVS.

Child selects	Full food items	Reimbursable meal?
Strawberries (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	2	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 VF and 1 M).
Bagel (1 G) Strawberries (1 VF)	2	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 G and 1 VF).
Bagel (1 G) Milk (1 M)	2	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 G and 1 M).
Strawberries (1 VF) Orange slices (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (2 VF and 1 M).
Bagel (1 G) Orange slices (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 G, 1 VF, and 1 M).
Bagel (1 G) Strawberries (1 VF) Orange slices (1 VF)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (2 VF and 1 G).

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Example 2: Breakfast menu with five food items

Breakfast meal pattern for OVS	Planned menu	Food items
G, 2 oz eq	Whole-wheat toast, 1-ounce slice Whole-grain cereal, 1 oz eq	2 G
VF, ½ cup	Blueberries, ½ cup	1 VF
M, 1 cup ¹	Unflavored low-fat milk, 1 cup	1 M
MMA (1 oz eq) or additional VF (½ cup) or G (1 oz eq)	Peanut butter, 2 tablespoons	1 MMA
G, 2 oz eq	Whole-wheat toast, 1-ounce slice Whole-grain cereal, 1 oz eq	2 G

Child selects	Full food items	Reimbursable meal?
Toast (1 G) Cereal (1 G) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (2 G and 1 M).
Toast (1 G) Peanut butter (1 MMA) Blueberries (1 VF)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 G, 1 MMA, and 1 VF).
Toast (1 G) Cereal (1 G) Blueberries (1 VF)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (2 G and 1 VF).
Toast (1 G) Blueberries (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 G, 1 VF, and 1 M).
Toast (1 G) Peanut butter (1 MMA) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 G, 1 MMA, and 1 M).
Peanut butter (1 MMA) Blueberries (1 VF) Milk (1 M)	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three different food items (1 MMA, 1 VF, and 1 M).
Toast, 2 slices (1 G) Blueberries (1 VF)	2	No. The selected meal contains only two food items (1 G and 1 VF). Two servings of the same food count as only one food item.

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OVS at Lunch and Supper

The at-risk afterschool center must offer the full serving (minimum required amount) of the five meal components (milk, MMA, vegetables, fruits, and grains). Children must select the full serving of at least three meal components for a reimbursable meal. Children may decline any two meal components at lunch or supper, including milk.

For a reimbursable lunch or supper, children must always select the full serving of at least three meal components.

Table 2 summarizes the OVS requirements for lunch and supper.

Table 2. OVS lunch and supper requirements

Center must offer all five meal components at lunch and all four meal components at supper	Child must select
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Milk, 1 cup ¹2. Fruits, ¼ cup3. Vegetables, ½ cup4. Grains, 1 oz eq5. MMA, 2 oz eq	At least three meal components (children may decline any two meal components)



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Menu planning guidance for lunch and supper

Lunches and suppers in at-risk afterschool centers must meet the criteria below to be reimbursable under OVS.

- Larger servings of the same food count as only one meal component. The examples below illustrate this requirement.
 - A 1-cup serving of broccoli counts as only one meal component (vegetables component).
 - Two 1-ounce slices of whole-grain bread (2 oz eq) count as only one meal component (grains component).
- If the menu offers the full serving of a meal component as two separate foods, children must take both foods to count as one meal component for OVS. The examples below illustrate this requirement.
 - The lunch/supper meal pattern requires $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the vegetables component. If the lunch menu offers $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of broccoli and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of corn, children must select both food items to count as the full vegetables component.
 - The lunch/supper meal pattern requires 1 oz eq of the grains component. If the menu offers $\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq of brown rice and $\frac{1}{2}$ oz eq of whole-wheat roll, children must select both food items to count as the full grains component.
- Amounts less than the full serving do not count as a meal component for OVS. For example, a selection of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of broccoli does not count as the vegetables component because the required lunch and supper meal pattern serving is $\frac{1}{2}$ cup.
- Children may decline any one or two food components, including milk.
- If a combination food contains three or more meal components, a child cannot decline the combination food. For example, a lunch menu offers spinach lasagna made with cheese (MMA component), lasagna noodles (grains component), and spinach and tomato sauce (vegetables component) served with apple slices (fruits component) and milk. Children must select at least the lasagna (three meal components) for a reimbursable meal.

Examples of OVS at Lunch at Supper

The examples below show how to implement OVS at lunch and supper. The at-risk afterschool center must offer the full serving of all meal components. For a reimbursable lunch or supper, children must select the full serving of at least three meal components.

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Lunch/supper menu example 1

Lunch/supper meal pattern	Planned menu	Meal pattern contribution
MMA, 2 oz eq	Turkey, 2 ounces	2 ounces MMA
G, 1 oz eq	Whole-wheat bread, 2 ounces	2 oz eq G ¹
V, ½ cup	Broccoli florets, ½ cup	½ cup V
F, ¼ cup	Cantaloupe slices, ¼ cup	¼ cup F
M, 1 cup	Unflavored low-fat milk, 1 cup	1 cup M

¹ Larger servings of the same food count as only one meal component for OVS.

Child selects	Menu items	Full meal components	Reimbursable meal?
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G)	1	2	No. The selected meal contains only two components (MMA and G).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Milk (M)	2	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (MMA, G, and M).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Cantaloupe slices (F)	2	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (MMA, G, and F).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Broccoli florets (V)	2	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (MMA, G, and V).
Broccoli florets (V) Cantaloupe slices (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (V, F, and M).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Broccoli florets (V) Milk (M)	3	4	Yes. The selected meal contains four components (MMA, G, V, and M).
Turkey sandwich (MMA, G) Cantaloupe slices (F) Milk (M)	3	4	Yes. The selected meal contains four components (MMA, G, F, and M).

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Lunch/supper menu example 2

Lunch/supper meal pattern	Planned menu	Meal pattern contribution
MMA 2 oz eq	Meat sauce, 2 ounces of cooked hamburger	2 ounces MMA
G, 1 oz eq	Spaghetti, 1 cup	2 oz eq G ¹
V, ½ cup	Tossed garden salad, 1 cup	½ cup V ²
F, ¼ cup	Fruit salad, ½ cup	½ cup F
M, 1 cup	Unflavored low-fat milk, 1 cup	1 cup M

¹ Larger servings of the same food count as only one food component for OVS.

² Raw leafy greens credit as half the volume served.

Child selects	Menu items	Full meal components	Reimbursable meal?
Spaghetti (G) Meat sauce (MMA)	2	2	No. The selected meal contains only two components (G and MMA).
Spaghetti (G) Fruit salad (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (G, F, and M).
Spaghetti (G) Meat sauce (MMA) Tossed salad (V) Milk (M)	4		Yes. The selected meal contains four components (G, MMA, V, and M).
Salad (V) Fruit salad (F) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains two components (V, F, and M).
Spaghetti (G) Meat sauce (MMA) Milk (M)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains three components (G, MMA, and M).
Spaghetti (G) Meat sauce (MMA) Fruit salad (F)	3	3	Yes. The selected meal contains two components (G, MMA, and F).

OVS in At-Risk Afterschool Centers in the CACFP

Resources

CACFP At-risk Afterschool Care Centers (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/cacfp-at-risk-afterschool-care-centers>

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 CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE webpage):

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

Crediting Summary Charts for the CACFP Meal Patterns for Children (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/crediting/crediting_summary_charts_cacfp.pdf

Guide to Meeting the CACFP Meal Patterns for Children and Crediting Requirements (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/mealpattern/guide_cacfp_meal_patterns.pdf

Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cacfp/crediting/guide_wgr_requirement_cacfp.pdf

Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-cacfp-child-care-programs>

Offer versus Serve (OVS) for At-risk Afterschool Programs (“Meal Service” section of CSDE’s Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-cacfp-child-care-programs/meal-service#OVS>

Offer Versus Serve in the CACFP (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/offer-versus-serve-cacfp>

USDA Final Rule (81 FR 24347): CACFP Meal Pattern Revisions Related to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/fr-042516>

USDA Memo CACFP 02-2025: Offer Versus Serve and Family Style Meals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/cacfp/offer-versus-serve-family-style-meals>

USDA Memo CACFP 15-2016: Optional Best Practices to Further Improve Nutrition in the CACFP:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/optional-best-practices-further-improve-nutrition-cacfp>

OVS in At-Risk Afterschool Centers in the CACFP

For information on the CACFP meal patterns for children, visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs](#) webpage and [Crediting Foods in CACFP Child Care Programs](#) webpage or contact the [CACFP 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/cacfp/atrisk/ovs_at_risk_cacfp.pdf.

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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