Guide to Meal Service Requirements for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program



School Year 2026-27 (July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027)

CONNECTICUT
Education

Revised October 2026

Connecticut State Department of Education
Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504
Hartford, CT 06103-1841

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   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

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

The Connecticut State Department of Education is committed to a policy of equal opportunity/affirmative action for all qualified persons. The Connecticut Department of Education does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race; color; religious creed; age; sex; pregnancy; sexual orientation; workplace hazards to reproductive systems, gender identity or expression; marital status; national origin; ancestry; retaliation for previously opposed discrimination or coercion, intellectual disability; genetic information; learning disability; physical disability (including, but not limited to, blindness); mental disability (past/present history thereof); military or veteran status; status as a victim of domestic violence; or criminal record in state employment, unless there is a bona fide occupational qualification excluding persons in any of the aforementioned protected classes. Inquiries regarding the Connecticut State Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to: Attorney Louis Todisco, Connecticut State Department of Education, by mail 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103-1841; or by telephone 860-713-6594; or by email louis.todisco@ct.gov.

Contents

About this Guide ..... **iii**
CSDE's Menu Planning Guidance Series iv
CSDE Contact Information ..... **v**
Abbreviations and Acronyms ..... **vi**
1 — Introduction **1**
Overview of NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns 1
Meal components and crediting requirements 1
Required documentation 2
Changes to NSLP and SBP meal patterns 2
Overview of Meal Service Requirements 3
Point-of-service Meal Counts 3
Guidance on Meeting the Meal Pattern Requirements 4
2 — Meal Schedules **1**
Timing and Length of Lunch Periods 1
USDA requirement for timing of lunch periods 1
State requirement for length of lunch periods 2
Timing and Length of Breakfast Periods 2
Guidelines for Meal Schedules 3
Meal Schedule Resources 4
3 — Types of Meal Service **5**
Cafeteria-style Meal Service 5
Pre-plated Meals 5
Family-style Meal Service 6
Quantity of meal components 6
Offering meal components or food items 6
Role of supervising adults 7
Second meals and servings 8
Avoiding compliance issues with family-style meal service 8
Requirement for written procedures 8
Meal Vending Machines 10
Classroom Meals 10

Field Trip Meals 11
Point-of-service meal counts for field trips 11
Food safety 12
Recommended SOP for field trip meals 12
Weekly meal pattern requirements 12
Offer versus Serve (OVS) 13
OVS at lunch 13
OVS at breakfast 13
Required signage for OVS 14
Resources for OVS 15
4 — Prohibition of Gender Separation 17
USDA Exceptions 17
5 — Water Availability 19
Overview of Water Requirements 19
Examples of How to Offer Water 20
Considerations for Offering Water 21
Allowable Costs for Offering Water 22
Resources for Offering Water 23
6 — Meal Identification Signage 25
Two Signage Requirements 25
Requirement 1: Identify foods and amounts offered for all planned reimbursable meals 25
Requirement 2: Identify required student selections for reimbursable meals with OVS 25
Acceptable Signage 26
Reviewing Signage for Compliance 26
When Signage is Not Required 26
Resources for Signage 27
7 — Multiple Serving Lines 29
Vegetable Subgroups Must be Offered on Each Lunch Serving Line 29
8 — Resources 31
Meal Components and Crediting 31
Meal Patterns and Menu Planning 32
Policy and Guidance 34
Glossary 37

About this Guide

The Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *Guide to Meal Service Requirements for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program* is part of the CSDE's menu planning guidance series for the school nutrition programs. (refer to "CSDE's Menu Planning Guidance Series" in this section). This guide provides comprehensive information and resources to assist school food authorities (SFAs) with meeting the meal service requirements for grades K-12 in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP. Meals and snacks offered in the SSO follow the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal pattern requirements.

The requirements in this guide apply to all public schools, private schools, and residential child care institutions (RCCIs) that participate in the NSLP, SBP, and SSO.

> This guide reflects the USDA regulations and policies in effect as of the publication date. Please note that this information may change. The CSDE will update this guide whenever the USDA issues new meal pattern guidance for the nutrition programs. Please check the CSDE's Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 webpage for the most current version. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_meal_service_nslp_sbp_k12.pdf.

The mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations does not imply approval or endorsement by the CSDE or the USDA. Product names are used solely for clarification.

Questions regarding this guide may be directed to Susan Fiore, MS, RD, Nutrition Education Coordinator, at 860-807-2075 or susan.fiore@ct.gov.

CSDE's Menu Planning Guidance Series

The CSDE's menu planning guidance series includes five comprehensive guides designed to assist SFAs with meeting the NSLP and SBP meal pattern and meal service requirements for grades K-12.

- Guide to the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program
- Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12
- Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs (applies to the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool)
- Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs (applies to the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool)
- Guide to Meal Service Requirements for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

These guides are available on the CSDE's Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 webpage.

CSDE Contact Information

For questions regarding the NSLP, SBP, and ASP, please contact the school nutrition programs staff in the CSDE's Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs. The CSDE's resource, *County Assignments for School Nutrition Programs*, indicates each Connecticut county's assigned CSDE school nutrition team member who provides technical assistance for the USDA school nutrition programs.

For a list of all CSDE Child Nutrition Programs staff, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Child Nutrition Staff and Responsibilities*.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AR	Administrative Review
ASP	Afterschool Snack Program of the NSLP
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
C.G.S.	Connecticut General Statutes
CN	Child Nutrition
CNP	Child Nutrition Program
CSDE	Connecticut State Department of Education
FBG	Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA)
FDP	Food Distribution Program
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FNA	Food and Nutrition Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture
ICN	Institute of Child Nutrition
LEA	local educational agency
MMA	meats/meat alternates
NSFSA	nonprofit school food service account
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
OVS	offer versus serve
oz eq	ounce equivalents
PFS	product formulation statement
RCCI	residential child care institution
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SFA	school food authority

SSO	Seamless Summer Option of the NSLP
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
WGR	whole grain-rich

For additional guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Common Acronyms and Abbreviations in the School Nutrition Programs*.



1 — Introduction

Meals served to grades K-12 must comply with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal patterns. The Seamless Summer Option (SSO) follows the NSLP and SBP meal patterns.

To receive reimbursement for meals served to students, school food authorities (SFAs) must provide the required meal components and minimum servings for each grade group. In addition to meeting the meal pattern requirements, SFAs must also comply with USDA regulations and policies for meal service.

Overview of NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 are designed to meet students' calorie needs, provide key nutrients, and align with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. These meal patterns help students eat the types and amounts of foods that best support their growth and development.

The NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grade K-12 require minimum daily and weekly servings of specific meal components for three different grade groups (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12). They also require that school menus meet the weekly dietary specifications (nutrition standards). SFAs that meet these meal pattern requirements may claim reimbursement for meals served to students.

Meal components and crediting requirements

A meal component is one of the five food groups that comprise reimbursable meals, including milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats/meat alternates (MMA). Each meal component has specific crediting requirements for foods and beverages to count as a meal component of reimbursable meals. All commercial products, foods made from scratch by the SFA, and foods prepared by vendors must meet these requirements to credit toward the meal components.

For detailed guidance on the crediting requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program* and *Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs*, and visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Required documentation

SFAs must be able to document that all reimbursable meals provide the required meal components and quantities for each meal and grade group. Without appropriate documentation, foods and beverages do not credit toward the school meal patterns. The CSDE will disallow reimbursement for noncompliant meals. For detailed guidance on the documentation requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

Changes to NSLP and SBP meal patterns

On April 25, 2024, the USDA published the final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. This final rule implements gradual updates to the Child Nutrition Programs in several key areas, including the school meal patterns. For more information on the final rule changes, refer to the CSDE's *Summary of Final Rule Updates to the Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the "Meal Pattern Changes" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Effective January 14, 2026, the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 amends the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to revise the requirements for milk and fluid milk substitutes in the NSLP. Effective June 8, 2026, the USDA final rule, *Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs*, changes the fluid milk requirements for the SBP patterns. For the NSLP and SBP meal patterns, allowable types of milk include unflavored whole milk and reduced fat (2%) milk in addition to the previously allowed low-fat (1%) milk and fat-free milk. SFAs may choose which types of fluid milk to offer within the milk variety requirement. For more information, visit the "Milk" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Overview of Meal Service Requirements

Federal and state regulations and policies address certain meal service requirements for the school nutrition programs. This includes requirements and guidance for meal schedules, types of meal service, point-of service meal counts, field trip meals, classroom meals, prohibition of gender separation, and water availability during the meal service.

Point-of-service Meal Counts

All meal counts of reimbursable meals must be recorded at the point of service. This is the moment in the meal service where staff can accurately determine that a reimbursable free, reduced-price, or paid meal has been served to a student, i.e., the student has received the minimum portions of all required meal components.

- For cafeteria-style meal service, staff must record point-of-service meal counts after all meal components of a reimbursable meal have been offered to the student. This is typically at the end of the serving line. For guidance on cafeteria-style meal service, refer to "Cafeteria-style meal service" in section 3.

- For pre-plated meal service (included bagged meals), staff must record point-of-service meal counts when the student receives the meal. For guidance on pre-plated meals, refer to "Pre-plated meals" in section 3.

- For family-style meal service, staff must record point-of-service meal counts while students are eating, but no later than the conclusion of the meal. For guidance on family-style meal service, refer to "Family-style Meal Service" in section 3.

Meal counts cannot be taken before or after the meal service. The USDA does not allow any other methods to determine meal counts, such as student attendance, orders for meals, and the number of meals sent to or returned from satellite locations. Meal counts must be recorded by trained staff who are familiar with the meal pattern requirements and can recognize reimbursable meals.

For more information on point-of-service meal counts, visit the CSDE's Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Guidance on Meeting the Meal Pattern Requirements

The resources below provide SFAs with information and guidance on meeting the meal pattern requirements for the school nutrition programs.

- Links to the USDA's regulations and final rules for the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs are available on the CSDE's Laws and Regulations for Child Nutrition Programs webpage.
- The USDA provides guidance for implementing the school nutrition programs through the policy memos on their Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) Documents & Resources webpage.
- The CSDE's Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs webpage provides links to relevant USDA memos by year, and includes memos from the CSDE Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs on the requirements for the school nutrition programs.
- The CSDE's Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs webpage provides an alphabetical listing of links to information and guidance on the federal and state requirements for the school nutrition programs, including the meal patterns and dietary specifications, crediting foods and beverages, menu documentation, and meal service.
- The CSDE's weekly e-newsletter for school nutrition programs, School Lunch Tray (SLT), provides important guidance and resources to help SFAs comply with the federal and state requirements, and identifies deadlines for completing required activities and submitting required reports.
- The CSDE hosts Table Talk webinars several times each month during the school year to review key topics and information contained in the SLT, as well as more in-depth training and information sessions on current topics. The schedule and registration information for the Table Talk webinars are available in the SLT.
- The CSDE's Training for Child Nutrition Programs webpage provides links to recorded trainings on a variety of topics, including the CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*.
- The CSDE's Manuals and Guides for Child Nutrition Programs webpage provides links to guides on a variety of topics, including food safety, menu planning and meal patterns, program administration, school wellness, and special diets.

SFAs may contact their assigned school nutrition team member for more information and program-specific questions

2 — Meal Schedules

Local educational agencies (LEAs) should schedule meal services to ensure good nutrition practices, minimize food waste, and provide sufficient time for students to eat. Federal and state laws address certain requirements for meal periods. In addition, LEAs are strongly encouraged to follow best practice recommendations for meal schedules.

Timing and Length of Lunch Periods

The timing and length of lunch periods in Connecticut schools are governed by federal and state laws. The NSLP regulations require that lunch must occur within specific timeframes (7 CFR 210.10(l)(1)) and encourage schools to provide sufficient lunch periods to give all students adequate time to be served and to eat their lunches (7 CFR 210.10(l)(2)). The Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) require a minimum 20-minute daily lunch period for all full-day students in public schools (Section 10-221o). These requirements are summarized below.

USDA requirement for timing of lunch periods

Section 7 CFR 210.10(l)(1) of the USDA's NSLP regulations specify that schools and institutions participating in the NSLP must serve lunches during the period from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. If lunches will be served before or after this time during regular school days or half days, LEAs must submit a written waiver request to the CSDE for the alternate lunch time. The CSDE must evaluate the circumstances of each request to determine whether it meets one of the two USDA criteria for an exemption from the specified timeframe for lunch

1. The CSDE may grant reasonable variances from the meal service time requirements to accommodate special circumstances encountered in schools operating for traditional students at traditional times. For example, if a school has a condensed schedule on a planned half day, the school may need to serve lunch prior to 10 a.m. due to capacity and may therefore request an exception from the CSDE to serve outside of the 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. timeframe.

2. The CSDE may grant reasonable variances from the meal service time requirements if the school operates for traditional students but at a nontraditional time. For example, a school may need to provide lunch service from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. to accommodate a work-study program that allows high school students to work in the morning and attend high school classes in the later afternoon or evening. For this specific circumstance, the CSDE will grant a meal service time variance only if: a) these alternative programs provide high school grade students an opportunity to obtain the minimum requirements

for graduation at a nontraditional time; and b) it is not possible to serve lunch during the 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. timeframe.

The written request for a variance in lunch service times must be submitted to the CSDE by one of the designated authorized signers for the LEA. This request must include a description of the special circumstances at the school that make it necessary for the school to serve lunch outside of the required NSLP service times.

The exemption request must emailed to the SFA's assigned CSDE school nutrition team member by July 1 for the upcoming school year. For more information, refer to CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 03-22: *Updated Requirements for Lunch Periods in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)*.

State requirement for length of lunch periods

C.G.S. Section 10-221o requires that all public schools must provide a minimum 20-minute daily lunch period for full-day students. This 20-minute lunch period is not required on half days or early dismissal days since school is not operating a full day. C.G.S. Section 10-221o applies only to full-day students. This state statute does not apply to half-day students, such as preschoolers in a half-day program.

For more information, refer to the CSDE's Circular Letter C-9: *Federal and State Requirements for Provision and Timeframe of Daily Lunch Period for Students* and CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 03-22: *Updated Requirements for Lunch Periods in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)*.

Timing and Length of Breakfast Periods

The SBP regulations do not require a specific timeframe or length for breakfast. However, Section 7 CFR 220.2 of the SBP regulations requires that breakfast must be served at or close to the beginning of the child's day at school. The CSDE recommends that scheduled mealtimes provide students with at least 10 minutes to eat after sitting down for breakfast. This time does not include the time needed to walk to the cafeteria from the classroom, select and pay for the meal, sit down at a table, and walk back to the classroom after the meal.

Guidelines for Meal Schedules

LEAs should consider appropriate timing for meal schedules to effectively meet students' nutritional needs and promote a healthy eating environment. Meal schedule should ensure good nutrition practices and minimize food waste. Generally, most children need to eat within 3 to 4 hours of their last meal.

- When the time span between breakfast and lunch is too short, children will not be hungry for lunch. An example is breakfast ending at 9:30 a.m. and lunch starting at 10:00 a.m. for the same group of students.

- When the time span between breakfast and lunch is too long, children can experience hunger symptoms that can interfere with learning, such as fatigue, irritability, inability to concentrate, weakness, and stomach pains. An example is breakfast ending at 8:00 a.m. and lunch starting at 1:00 p.m. for the same group of students.

SFAs should collaborate with school administrators to establish optimal meal schedules.



Meal Schedule Resources

The websites and resources below address the requirements for meal schedules.

- C.G.S. Section 10-221o. Lunch Periods and Recess (State of Connecticut): https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-221o
- Circular Letter C-9: Federal and State Requirements for Provision and Timeframe of Daily Lunch Period for Students (CSDE): https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/circular-letters/circ07-08/c9.pdf
- Lunch Periods: Required Time (CSDE's Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/program-guidance-school-nutrition-programs #LunchPeriods
- Making Time for Lunch (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention): https://www.cdc.gov/school-nutrition/school-meals/time-for-lunch.html
- NSLP Regulations CFR 210.10(l): Requirements for lunch periods (USDA) https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-210#p-210.10(l)(1)
- Operational Memorandum No. 02-23: National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Requirements for Regular and Shortened School Days (CSDE) https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/memos/om2023/om02-23.pdf
- Operational Memorandum No. 03-22: Updated Requirements for Lunch Periods in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP): https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/memos/om2022/om03-22.pdf
- SBP Regulations 7 CFR 220.2 "Breakfast" (USDA): https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-220#p-220.2(Breakfast)
- Time to Eat (Action for Healthy Kids): https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/activity/time-to-eat/

For additional guidance, visit the "Lunch Periods: Required Time" section of the CSDE's Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

3 — Types of Meal Service

SFAs may choose from a variety of meal service options for the school nutrition programs, based on what is appropriate to the individual needs and logistics of each school. In addition to cafeteria-style meal service, SFAs may implement other types of meal service such as pre-plated, family style, and combination style. Other meal service considerations include meal vending machines, classroom meals, field trip meals, and OVS.

Each type of meal service has specific requirements and must ensure that reimbursable meals are identified at the point of service (refer to "Point-of-service meal counts" in section 1).

Cafeteria-style Meal Service

Cafeteria-style meal service is the common type of meal service in school settings. Students go through the cafeteria serving line and food service staff serve each child the required meal components of their meal. Students may also self-serve some foods, such as selecting a carton of milk or a piece of fresh fruit.

Staff must record meal counts for cafeteria-style meal service at the point of service, which is typically at the end of the serving line, after all components of a reimbursable meal have been offered to the student.

Pre-plated Meals

Pre-plated meal service is a method of meal service where staff pre-plate the minimum portion of each meal component, based on the meal pattern requirements for each grade group. Pre-plated meals must offer all required meal components and quantities in the meal pattern for each grade group, including the daily and weekly minimums, and for lunch, the weekly vegetable subgroups. For guidance on the NSLP and SBP meal patterns, visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Pre-plated meals may also allow students to self-serve some of the meal components or food items. To the extent possible, the USDA encourages schools to modify their meal service systems to include offer versus serve (OVS) opportunities. For example, SFAs could pre-plate some items like the entree, vegetables, and grains, and allow students a choice of others. An example is providing a basket with a variety of fruits or a separate cooler with milk choices. For more information, refer to "Offer versus Serve (OVS)" in this section.

Staff must record point-of-service meal counts when the child receives all required meal components. This also applies to bagged meals handed out to students during the meal.

Family-style Meal Service

Family style is an optional type of meal service that allows students to serve themselves from communal platters or bowls of food with assistance, if needed, from supervising adults who sit with the students. Unlike pre-plated meal service or cafeteria-style meal service, family-style meals allow some latitude in the initial portion sizes because additional servings of each food are readily available at each table, and more can be served at any time.

SFAs that choose to implement family-style meal service must follow the procedures below to ensure that meals comply with the meal pattern requirements and are eligible for reimbursement.

Quantity of meal components

Staff must place enough prepared food and milk on each table to provide the minimum daily portions of each meal component for all students at the table and to accommodate any supervising adults who eat with the students. Meals must include a variety of milk (at least two choices). At least one choice must be unflavored.

SFAs must plan and offer the required food quantities for each child participating in the meal. These offered amounts must meet the minimum daily and weekly meal components and the weekly dietary specifications.

Offering meal components or food items

Supervising adults should offer all students the full portion of each meal component or food item over the course of the meal. Since replenishment is immediately available at each table, students may select an initial serving of a meal component or food item that is less than the full portion. The supervising adult should encourage additional portions and selections to meet the minimum portion as appropriate.

Role of supervising adults

During the meal, supervising adults are responsible for actively encouraging each student to accept the full portion of each meal component. For example, if a student initially refuses a meal component or does not accept the full portion, the supervising adult should offer the meal component to the student again. The requirements for family-style meal service depend on whether the school implements OVS.

- **Schools without OVS:** If the SFA does not implement OVS, students must take the minimum portion of all five meal components at lunch and all three meal components at breakfast to count as a reimbursable meal.

- **Schools with OVS:** If the SFA implements OVS at lunch, students must take at least three of the five meal components, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving (minimum daily amount) of at least two other meal components. If the SFA implements OVS at breakfast, students must select at least ½ cup of fruits (or vegetables, if offered) and the full serving of at least two other food items. For more information, refer to "Offer versus Serve (OVS)" in this section.

Family-style meal service must be strictly supervised to ensure that schools serve reimbursable meals and follow adequate daily collection procedures. Supervising adults must be present and monitor the entire process at each table to ensure that students take a reimbursable meal.

Supervising adults must follow the proper procedures for counting reimbursable meals at the point of service. Point-of-service meal counts must be recorded while students are eating, but no later than the conclusion of the meal service (refer to "Point-of-service meal counts" in section 1).

Supervising adults must track students each day to determine who ate lunch in each meal eligibility category (free, reduced, and paid), without overt identification of the student's eligibility status.

> The USDA defines overt identification as any action that may result in a child being recognized as potentially eligible to receive or certified for free or reduced-price meals or afterschool snacks.

Second meals and servings

During family style meal service, students may select additional servings beyond the minimum quantity required in the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. However, SFAs cannot claim additional reimbursement for second meals and larger servings. SFAs can claim only one reimbursable breakfast and one reimbursable lunch for each student per day.

If a school elects to offer second servings of any part of the reimbursable meal without charging an a la carte price, these foods must count toward the daily and weekly meal pattern requirements and the weekly dietary specifications. Allowing second servings of any foods cannot cause the menu to exceed the weekly limits for calories, saturated fat, and sodium.

Avoiding compliance issues with family-style meal service

Implementation of family-style meal service might not be practical in many schools. During the Administrative Reviews of the school nutrition programs, the CSDE has observed many compliance issues with family-style meal service. SFAs must carefully consider whether a school has the capacity to implement this type of meal service correctly and ensure that reimbursable meals are served. Due to the high level of supervision required during family-style meal service, many schools do not implement this type of meal service.

Requirement for written procedures

SFAs that choose to implement family-style meal service must develop written procedures for complying with all requirements. These procedures must indicate how the school will implement family-style meal service and provide assurances that all staff will meet the requirements below.

- The SFA will prepare, and supervising adults will offer, the minimum serving for each required meal component in the NSLP and SBP meal patterns.
- Family-style meal service will be monitored by a trained supervising adult to ensure that students take a reimbursable meal. As a best practice, the supervising adult should sit with the students at each table.
- Meals will be counted at the point of service. SFAs will claim reimbursable meals based on a child's free, reduced, or paid status.
- Supervising adults and other applicable staff will prevent overt identification of students' meal eligibly status during family-style meal service.

- SFAs will conduct and document adequate training for all supervising adults. These topics should include guidance on meeting the NSLP and SBP meal patterns and what constitutes a reimbursable meal with family-style meal service, proper meal counting procedures at the point of service (refer to the CSDE's Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs webpage), and the civil rights requirements (refer to the "Civil Rights Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs" section of the CSDE's Civil Rights for Child Nutrition Programs webpage).

> The SFA must share their family-style meal service procedures with all staff and supervising adults involved in implementing family-style meal service. These procedures must also be available for audit purposes during the CSDE's Administrative Review of the school nutrition programs.

For additional guidance, refer to USDA Memo SP 35-2011: *Clarification on the Use of Offer Versus Serve and Family Style Meal Service*. SFAs may contact their assigned CSDE school nutrition team member for technical assistance (refer to the CSDE's *County Assignments for School Nutrition Programs*).



Meal Vending Machines

Vending machines that provide reimbursable meals are subject to the same USDA regulations and meal service requirements as meals offered in the cafeteria. SFAs must ensure that meal vending machines can properly dispense reimbursable meals and can accurately document when an eligible student selects a reimbursable meal.

Meal vending machines must offer all required meal components and quantities for each grade group, including the daily and weekly minimums for breakfast and lunch and the weekly vegetable subgroups for lunch (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program*). For example, a meal vending machine that allows students to choose one sandwich will meet the weekly vegetable subgroups requirement if it also offers a selection of all vegetable subgroups during the week.

Classroom Meals

Serving meals in the classroom is an optional meal service method for the NSLP and SBP. SFAs must ensure that all staff involved with classroom meals understand and follow the USDA's requirements for reimbursable meals in the classroom, including point-of-service meal counts (refer to "Point-of-service meal counts" in section 1). This is especially important for non-food service staff (such as teachers, teacher aides, and other applicable classroom staff) who may not be familiar with the USDA meal counting requirements for reimbursable meals.

The CSDE strongly recommends that SFAs develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) for classroom meals to ensure that the meal service and meal counting requirements are clearly communicated. For an example of a classroom meals SOP, refer to Iowa State University's Breakfast in the Classroom SOP. For more examples of SOPs, refer to the CSDE's *Sample Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN) Standard Operating Procedures webpage.

For more information on the requirements for classroom meals and how to avoid common meal pattern compliance issues, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Requirements for Classroom Meals in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*.

Field Trip Meals

Meals offered to students for school-supervised field trips are reimbursable if they meet the daily meal pattern requirements for each grade group and are served and consumed as part of a school-related function. These functions must be part of the curriculum, as defined by the CSDE, and cannot be extracurricular events.

> SFAs must provide the full required quantities of all meal components for each meal, including fluid milk. Juice or water cannot be substituted for milk on field trips. SFAs may consider using aseptically packaged milk to ensure food safety. However, it is still important to implement procedures to keep the milk cold to ensure it remains appealing to students. Milk tastes best when served at 35°F.

Point-of-service meal counts for field trips

Staff supervising the field trip must follow the appropriate procedures for point-of-service meal counts (refer to "Point-of-service meal counts" in section 1). For field trips, the point of service is the moment in the meal service at the field trip site where staff can accurately determine that the child has been served all required meal components for a reimbursable meal.

The USDA does not allow any other methods to determine field trip meal counts, such as field trip attendance, orders for field trip meals, the number of meals sent on the field trip, or the number of meals returned from the field trip. Meal counts must be recorded by trained staff who are familiar with the meal pattern requirements and can recognize reimbursable meals.

SFAs must develop a local process to ensure that staff take accurate point-of-service meal counts for field trips. The CSDE recommends developing a SOP for field trips that includes meal count procedures (refer to 'Recommended SOP for Field Trip Meals " in this section).



Food safety

Field trip meals must comply with Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP). The SFA's SOP for field trip meals must include appropriate food safety procedures (such as ice packs and coolers) to ensure that field trip meals stay at proper temperatures. For additional guidance, visit the CSDE's Food Safety for Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

Recommended SOP for field trip meals

The CSDE encourages SFAs to develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) with clear written procedures for field trip meals. The SOP should include information on how to identify reimbursable meals, instructions for conducting point-of-service meal counts, food safety requirements, and a plan for informing substitutes and volunteers of the requirements for field trip meals.

For an example of a field trip SOP, refer to the Iowa State University's *Standard Operating Procedure: Field Trip Meals*. For more examples of SOPs, refer to the CSDE's *Sample Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN) Standard Operating Procedures webpage.

Weekly meal pattern requirements

SFAs are not required to adjust the planned weekly menu to account for occasional field trips or pack the same vegetable offering from that day's "hot" lunch menu for a field trip. SFAs have the option to offer a different vegetable from another subgroup or the same subgroup. For example, if the regular menu includes cooked carrots (red/orange subgroup), the field trip lunch could include raw carrot sticks (red/orange subgroup) or celery sticks (other subgroup).

SFAs must include field trip meals when planning meals that meet the minimum weekly requirements for the grains component and MMA component, and the weekly dietary specifications. For information on planning school meals to meet 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.

> For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Requirements for Field Trip Meals in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*.

Offer versus Serve (OVS)

OVS is a concept that applies to menu planning and the determination of reimbursable meals for grades K-12 in the NSLP, SBP, and SSO. The requirements for implementing OVS are defined in 7 CFR 210.10(e) of the NSLP regulations and 7 CFR 220.8(e) of the SBP regulations.

- OVS must be implemented at lunch in senior high schools but is optional for all other grades.
- OVS is optional for the SBP and SSO.
- OVS applies to the daily meal pattern requirements. Students may decline a certain number of meal components (lunch) or food items (breakfast) in the meal and select the foods they prefer to eat.
- OVS is not allowed for the NSLP or SBP preschool meal patterns (ages 1-5) or the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP.

> The USDA encourages schools to use the OVS flexibility at lunch and breakfast for all grade levels to reduce food waste and enhance student choices. OVS allows SFAs the flexibility to address student participation and selection trends to determine what and how much food to prepare.

An overview of the OVS requirements for lunch and breakfast is below. For detailed guidance, refer to the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals* and visit the CSDE's Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

OVS at lunch

SFAs must offer each grade group the full serving (minimum daily amount) of the five NSLP meal components (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and MMA). For a reimbursable lunch under OVS, students must select at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving of at least two other meal components. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Overview of Offer Versus Serve (OVS) in the National School Lunch Program*.

OVS at breakfast

SFAs must offer each grade group the full serving (minimum daily amount) of at least four food items from the three SBP meal components (milk, fruits including vegetable substitutions, and grains/MMA). The four food items must include the three meal components plus an additional

serving of grains/MMA or fruit (including vegetable substitutions). For a reimbursable breakfast under OVS, students must select at least three food items, including at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitution, if offered). For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Overview of Offer Versus Serve (OVS) in the School Breakfast Program*.

Required signage for OVS

SFAs must post two different types of cafeteria signage that clearly communicate the meal components (lunch) or food items (breakfast) for each daily menu choice and indicate what students must select for a reimbursable meal. The first type of signage must identify all planned reimbursable meals (i.e., all offered full meals), including the meal components/food items and portions and any choices or combination of choices available within each meal component. This signage must be near or at the beginning of each serving line.

The second type of signage must indicate what meal components/food items and amounts students may select for a reimbursable meal with OVS, based on the planned daily menu for each grade group. This signage must be posted at all applicable points in the serving line where the food items are available. For example, if the SFA offers all fruit and vegetable choices for grades 9-12 in ½-cup servings, the lunch menu and cafeteria signage must indicate that students may select up to two servings of fruits and two servings of vegetables with each meal.

For more information and examples of signage, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Signage Requirements for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program* and *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*, and visit the "Signage and Posters" section of the CSDE's Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs webpage.



Resources for OVS

The resources below provide guidance on implementing OVS.

- 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/ovs_guide_snp.pdf
- Offer versus Serve Posters for Breakfast and Lunch (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/nslp/offer-versus-serve-posters
- Offer versus Serve Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers: National School Lunch Program (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/offer-vs-serve-lunch-program-tip-sheet
- Offer versus Serve Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers: School Breakfast Program (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/offer-vs-serve-breakfast-program-tip-sheet
- Signage Requirements for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE): https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/ovs/signage_requirements_nslp_sbp.pdf
- USDA Memo SP 14-2025: Offer versus Serve Flexibilities for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program: https://www.fna.usda.gov/schoolmeals/offer-vs-serve-flexibilities
- USDA Memo SP 41-2015: Updated Offer vs Serve Guidance for the NSLP and SBP Beginning SY 2015-16: https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16
- USDA Regulations for the NSLP: Offer versus serve for grades K through 12 (7 CFR 210.10(e)): https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-210#p-210.10(e)
- USDA Regulations for the SBP: Offer versus serve for grades K through 12 (7 CFR 220.8(e)): https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-220#p-220.8(e)

- What's in a Meal Module 17: Offer versus Serve (OVS) in the National School Lunch Program (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials#module17

- What's in a Meal Module 18: Offer versus Serve (OVS) in the School Breakfast Program (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials#module18

For more visit the CSDE's Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs webpage.



4 — Prohibition of Gender Separation

In general, the USDA's nondiscrimination laws and policies in 7 CFR Parts 15, 15a, and 15b do not permit intuitions participating in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs to separate children on any protected basis during the service of reimbursable meals or snacks. Federal law prohibits discrimination based on gender at any educational institution receiving federal assistance.

USDA Exceptions

The USDA allows two exceptions to the prohibition of gender-separated meal service.

1. **Coeducational schools and school-based sites:** The USDA recognizes religious exemptions granted by the federal Department of Education (ED) without prior express approval. ED guidelines allow school and school-based sites to apply for an exemption when federal law prohibiting gender separation is inconsistent with the institution's religious tenets. These exemptions apply broadly to operations, including the meal service at a given site, such as a faith-based school. Additionally, ED guidelines specifically allow for the approval of gender-separate instruction at public primary and secondary non-vocational schools that could take a variety of forms. Since the general rule is that gender separation during meal service is prohibited, a coeducational school may not use limited ED approval of gender-separate instruction to justify blanket gender separation during meal service. Limited exemptions in these situations must be approved by the USDA.

2. **Other institutions and organizations:** State agencies may approve exemptions allowing separation by gender during meal service without express prior approval from the USDA in the following circumstances:

    - meal service at religious institutions operating under the dictates of the religion with which they are affiliated;
    - meal service at juvenile correctional facilities where combining members of the opposite gender would present a potential safety risk; and
    - meal service at facilities that fully separate by gender as part of their normal operations, e.g., gender-separated summer camps.

When requesting an exemption, the institution must submit the request in writing to the CSDE and specify which reason applies and why separation by gender is necessary.

4 | Prohibition of Gender Separation

The two exceptions described above are the only acceptable bases for gender separation during meal service in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs. Any gender separation not based on the ED or USDA approval processes is strictly prohibited.

Situations that do not clearly fit into any of the exemptions outlined above may be considered on a case-by-case basis by the CSDE in direct consultation with the USDA FNA Regional Office, including the FNA Civil Rights Office and appropriate FNA National Office Child Nutrition Program staff.

For more information, refer to USDA Memo SP 31 2015, CACFP 12-2015, and SFSP 14-2015: *Guidance on Prohibition of Separation by Gender during Child Nutrition Program Meal Service*.



5 — Water Availability

The NSLP regulations (7 CFR 210.10(a)(1)(i)) and SBP regulations (7 CFR 220.8(a)(1)) require that schools and institutions must make plain potable water available without restriction to students at no charge during the service of reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. Potable water is water that is safe for human consumption.

"Available without restriction" means that students can freely access the water in the location where the meals and afterschool snacks are served. For example, if the SFA meets the water requirement with a water fountain that is in the cafeteria or immediately adjacent, students must be allowed to leave their tables to access the water fountain during the meal service.

The USDA requires that water must be unflavored. Schools cannot add sliced fruits or vegetables to water for flavor, such as orange and lemon slices or sliced cucumbers.

Overview of Water Requirements

The requirement for water availability applies to the NSLP, SBP, ASP, and SSO.

- **NSLP (including SSO school sites):** Water must be available at any location where lunch is served. This includes the cafeteria and any other meal service areas outside of the cafeteria, such as lunch carts, meals served in the classroom, and meals served during in-school suspension.

- **SBP (including SSO school sites):** Water must be available when breakfast is served in the cafeteria. The water requirement does not apply to breakfast meal service outside of the cafeteria, such as breakfast in the classroom.

- **ASP:** Water must be available during the afterschool snack service.

All schools implementing the NSLP, SBP, ASP, and SSO must meet these requirements. The water requirement does not apply to field trips where reimbursable meals are served. However, the USDA encourages schools to make water available for all school-related functions, including field trips.

Examples of How to Offer Water

SFAs may implement the water requirement in a variety of ways. Some examples are listed below.

- Offer water pitchers and cups on tables or in an area that is easily accessible to all students during meals and afterschool snacks.
- Provide a water fountain or a faucet that allows unrestricted access for students to fill their own bottles or cups with drinking water. This option must comply with the requirements below.

    1. The location of the water fountain or faucet must be in the foodservice area or immediately adjacent. An example is a water fountain that is right outside the door to the foodservice area and accessible to all students during the meal period.
    2. The water fountain or faucet must be operational.
    3. Staff members who supervise students in the cafeteria, such as lunch aides or paraprofessionals, must allow students to leave their tables to access the water fountain or faucet during the meal service, and should be trained on this requirement. Students do not have unrestricted access to water if staff members deny their requests to get a drink of water.

- Offer bottled water at no cost to students.

SFAs may make plain potable water available in any way that 1) is without restriction where reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks are served; and 2) meets the USDA's requirements for an allowable cost to the nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA) (refer to "Allowable Costs for Offering Water" in this section).

Considerations for Offering Water

There are some important considerations to keep in mind when offering water to students during the service of reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks.

- While water must be made available to students during the meal and afterschool snack service, water is not a meal component and is not part of reimbursable meals or afterschool snacks. Students are not required to take water.

- SFAs cannot promote or offer water or any other beverage as an alternative selection to fluid milk throughout the food service area. Commercially packaged water and potable drinking water should not be made available in any manner that interferes with students' selection of the required meal components of reimbursable meals, including milk. For example, water cannot be served from the milk cooler.

> Water is not a meal component and is not part of reimbursable meals or afterschool snacks.



Allowable Costs for Offering Water

The USDA does not provide any separate funding or reimbursement for the potable water requirement and SFAs cannot claim reimbursement for water. However, SFAs may use funds from the NSFSA to cover the allowable costs of providing potable water to students. An allowable cost is a cost that is considered reasonable, necessary, and allocable to the school nutrition programs. Some examples of possible allowable costs associated with providing potable water to students are listed below.

- Purchasing pitchers or cups that would be filled with water from the faucet or provided to students to fill with water from the faucet.
- Purchasing a 5-gallon dispenser for water. This cost would be allowable if the SFA has determined that this method of providing water is cost efficient and practical.
- Covering the cost of testing tap water and water fountains that will be used by students. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that all schools routinely test drinking water for lead and perform regular maintenance to ensure that drinking water is safe.

The determination of whether these costs are allowable for an individual SFA depends on their specific circumstances. Costs related to the purchase of potable water for consumption by students must always be reasonable, necessary, and allocable to the school nutrition programs. An allowable cost for one SFA might not be an allowable cost for another.

For guidance on how to determine allowable costs for the NSFSA, refer to the "General Criteria for Allowable Costs" section (page 13) of the USDA's manual, *Indirect Costs: Guidance for State Agencies & School Food Authorities*.

Resources for Offering Water

The websites and resources below provide guidance on offering water to students during the meal service.

- Indirect Costs: Guidance for State Agencies & School Food Authorities (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/indirect-cost-guidance
- USDA Memo SP 28-2011 Revised: Child Nutrition Reauthorization 2010: Water Availability During National School Lunch Program Meal Service: https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/water-availability-during-nslp-meal-service
- USDA Memo SP 39-2019: Clarification on the Milk and Water Requirements in the School Meal Programs: https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/clarification-milk-and-water-requirements-school-meal-program
- USDA Memo SP 49-2016 and CACFP 18-2016: Resources for Making Potable Water Available in Schools and Child Care Facilities: https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/resources-making-potable-water-available-schools-and-child-care-facilities-0
- Water Availability for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage) https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/water-availability-for-the-school-nutrition-programs
- Water Safety (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/fs/water-safety
- What's in a Meal Module 16: Water Availability During Meal Service (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials#module16

For additional guidance and resources, visit the CSDE's Water Availability for School Nutrition Programs webpage. Training on the water requirement is available in Module 16: Water Availability During Meal Service of the CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*.



6 — Meal Identification Signage

Students, servers, and cashiers must be able to identify what constitutes a reimbursable meal. The USDA's NSLP and SBP regulations require SFAs to post cafeteria signage that provides clear information about the daily planned reimbursable meals and all allowable choices. The purpose of this signage is to prevent unintentional purchases of a la carte items and help students choose a reimbursable meal.

Two Signage Requirements

SFAs must post two different types of cafeteria signage. This signage must clearly communicate the meal components for each daily menu choice and indicate what students must select for a reimbursable meal.

Requirement 1: Identify foods and amounts offered for all planned reimbursable meals

Section 7 CFR 210.10(a)(2) of the NSLP regulations and section 7 CFR 220.8(a)(2) of the SBP regulations require that SFAs must post signage to identify the planned reimbursable meals (i.e., all offered full meals), including the meal components and portions and any choices or combination of choices available within each meal component. This signage must be located near or at the beginning of each serving line.

> This requirement applies to all schools and institutions, including those that do not implement OVS and those that implement family-style meal service.

Requirement 2: Identify required student selections for reimbursable meals with OVS

Schools that implement OVS must indicate the minimum amount of each meal component (lunch) or food item (breakfast) that students must select for a reimbursable meal, based on the planned daily menu for each grade group. This signage must be posted at all applicable points in the serving line where the meal components or food items are available.

- **Example:** A high school lunch menu offers fruits and vegetables in ½-cup servings and allows students to select two servings of fruits and two servings of vegetables to meet

the required 1-cup serving for grades 9-12. The cafeteria signage must clearly communicate that students may select up to two servings of fruit and two servings of vegetables with each meal. This signage must be located on the serving line where the fruit and vegetable options are available.

SFAs are not required to provide detailed information about the meal components, such as identifying the vegetable subgroups. However, the CSDE strongly encourages SFAs to provide detailed information whenever possible, within the constraints of the menu and serving line. This helps promote the school nutrition programs and makes it easier for students to understand what reimbursable meals include.

Acceptable Signage

SFAs may choose how to identify the foods that are part of reimbursable meals, based on their facilities, layout, and other considerations. Some examples of acceptable types of signage include menu boards, posters, signs, labels, and table tents.

Reviewing Signage for Compliance

The questions below help SFAs determine if cafeteria signage meets the USDA requirements. SFAs should answer these questions for each cafeteria serving line. If any answers are "no," the SFA must update the cafeteria signage as applicable.

- Is signage available for each daily lunch and breakfast choice and each serving line?
- Is signage clearly visible?
- Is signage located at or near the beginning of each serving line?
- OVS only: Is signage located at the applicable points in the serving line near each meal component (lunch) or food item (breakfast)?

A helpful best practice strategy to determine if the cafeteria signage is clear and effective is to conduct a cafeteria walk-through from the perspective of students. Review the signage at the beginning of the serving line and continue through the entire serving line to the point of service.

When Signage is Not Required

Signage is not required for field trips or breakfast in the classroom. If choices are offered, SFAs should use other methods to inform students about what to select and whether OVS is implemented. For more information on OVS, refer to "Offer versus Serve (OVS)" in section 3.

Resources for Signage

Signage resources and templates are available in the "Required Signage for OVS" section of the CSDE's Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs webpage. For more information and examples of signage, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Signage Requirements for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program* and *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*.

Training on the signage requirements for OVS is available in Module 17: Offer versus Serve (OVS) in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and Module 18: Offer versus Serve (OVS) in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) of the CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*.


TODAY'S MENU
Choose at least 3 colors. And be sure to include a fruit or vegetable to make a healthy school lunch!
Protein
(CHOOSE 1)
Oven-Fried Chicken
Grab 'n Go Hummus with Pita
Bistro Salad Plate
Grains
(CHOOSE 1)
Warm Roll
Grab 'n Go Hummus with Pita
Vegetables
BISTRO SALAD PLATE OR (CHOOSE 2)
Mashed Potatoes
Fresh Steamed Broccoli
Crunchy Carrots and Celery
Fruit
(CHOOSE 1)
Cool Honeydew Melon
Fresh Grapes
Cinnamon Applesauce
Milk
(CHOOSE 1)
Fat Free Milk
Low Fat (1%) Milk
Fat Free Chocolate Milk

7 — Multiple Serving Lines

When SFAs offer a variety of meal choices or have multiple serving lines, the USDA regulations require that schools must make all meal components available to all students on every lunch line in at least the minimum required amounts.

> To meet the meal pattern requirements, menu planners should think of each serving line as its own entity. The daily and weekly requirements must be in place for each line. For example, when schools have multiple serving lines with different menu items, each serving line must offer all vegetable subgroups during the week and provide the minimum weekly oz eq of the grains component and MMA component.

When the school cafeteria has serving stations where students can go to several different places to select different meal components before passing the point of service, all stations must meet the daily and weekly requirements. The point of service is the point in the food service operation where staff can accurately determine that a reimbursable free, reduced-price, or paid lunch has been served to an eligible child.

An example might be a food court or scatter system where every student can select meal components from a variety of stations before reaching the cashier, such as an entree line, a salad bar with vegetables and fruits, a pasta and bread station, and a milk cooler. While these types of food service systems are not typical in Connecticut schools, SFAs that use them must ensure that all meal components are available to all students. In general, SFAs must plan to make all required daily and weekly meal components available to all students on each serving line.

Vegetable Subgroups Must be Offered on Each Lunch Serving Line

When SFAs have multiple serving lines or offer a variety of meal choices at lunch, the minimum required portion of all meal components must be available to all students for every meal. Each lunch choice on the serving line must offer students access to the same daily vegetable subgroups, unless the SFA implements one of the menu planning practices below.:

1. The lunch menu offers that same subgroup again later in the week. For example, the SFA offers vegetables from the red/orange subgroup on Monday and Thursday.

2. The lunch menu offers selections from each vegetable subgroup daily, such as a vegetable subgroup "rainbow" tray. For example, Wednesday's rainbow tray might include a choice of carrots (red/orange), broccoli (dark green), corn (starchy), sliced cucumbers (other), and kidney beans (beans, peas, and lentils). Offering a "rainbow" tray is a best practice for meeting the NSLP meal pattern requirements for the weekly vegetable subgroups.

When planning lunch menus to meet the weekly vegetable subgroups, menu planners should think of each serving line as its own entity. The daily and weekly requirements must be in place for each serving line. The examples below illustrate this requirement.

- **Example 1:** A school offers a hot lunch choice and cold lunch choice on the same lunch line. Tuesday's menu offers corn (starchy subgroup) as the daily vegetable for the hot lunch menu and baby carrots (red/orange subgroup) as the daily vegetable for the cold lunch menu. If the cold lunch menu does not offer corn (or another starchy vegetable) later in the week, corn (or another starchy vegetable) must be offered on Tuesday. Otherwise, students who select the cold lunch on Tuesday do not have access to all required weekly vegetable subgroups.

- **Example 2:** A school has three different lunch lines, including a hot lunch line, a deli line, and a grill line. Monday's hot lunch menu features baked beans (beans, peas, and lentils subgroup) as the daily vegetable. To meet the weekly vegetable subgroup requirement, baked beans (or another vegetable from the beans, peas, and lentils subgroup) must also be available on the other two serving lines. For example, Monday's menu for the deli line and grill line must include baked beans or another vegetable from the bean, peas, and lentils subgroup, such as garbanzo beans or lentils. SFAs cannot post signs on the deli line and grill line directing students to select the vegetable subgroup choice from a different serving line. Each serving line must offer the full meal, including all vegetable subgroups on a weekly basis.

For information on the vegetable subgroups, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program*. For guidance on crediting vegetables, refer to the CSDE's *Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the "Vegetables" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.







8 — Resources

This section includes additional resources and websites to assist SFAs with meeting the NSLP and SBP meal patterns and the crediting, documentation, and meal service requirements for the school nutrition programs. More links to information on the federal and state requirements and guidance for school meals are available on the CSDE's Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs webpages. For a list of resources on the NSLP and SBP meal patterns and crediting requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the School Nutrition Programs*.

Meal Components and Crediting

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 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

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/guide_wgr_requirement_snp_ grades_k-12.pdf

Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/resources_school_ meal_patterns_snp.pdf

Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning-guidance-for-school-meals

Noncreditable Foods in the Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/noncreditable_foods_snp.pdf

What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE's Meal Pattern Training for School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials

Meal Patterns and Menu Planning

Breakfast Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs/breakfast-meal-patterns

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

Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE): https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_dietary_specifications_nslp_sbp_k12.pdf

Lunch Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs/lunch-meal-patterns

Meal Pattern Changes (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs #Meal_Pattern_Changes

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs

Menu Planner for School Meals (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/menu-planner-school-meals

Menu Planning Checklists for Lunch for Grades K-12 (CSDE's Forms for School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/forms-for-school-nutrition-programs #MenuPlanning ChecklistsLunchGradesK-12

Menu Planning for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning

Nutrition Standards for School Meals (USDA webpage):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/schoolmeals/nutrition-standards

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/ovs_guide_snp.pdf

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

Overview of Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the School Breakfast Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/sbp/overview_menu_planning_sbp_ grades_k-12.pdf

Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/preschool-meal-pattern-training

Sodium Limits for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/sodium_limits_nslp_sbp.pdf

What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE's Meal Pattern Training for School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials

Policy and Guidance

C.G.S. Section 10-221q. Sale of beverages:
https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-221q

Child Nutrition Programs Legislation and Regulations (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/legislation-regulations

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for the National School Lunch Program (7 CFR 210) (USDA):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-210

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for the School Breakfast Program (7 CFR 220) (USDA):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-220

Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) Documents and Resources (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/resources

Laws and Regulations for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/laws-and-regulations-for-child-nutrition-programs

Manuals and Guides for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/manuals-and-guides-for-child-nutrition-program

Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/lists/operational-memoranda-for-school-nutrition-programs

Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/program-guidance-school-nutrition-programs

Questions and Answers on Connecticut Statutes for School Foods and Beverages CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/hfc/questions_answers_connecticut_statutes_school_foods_beverages.pdf

School Lunch Tray and Table Talk (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/school-lunch-tray-and-table-talk

Training for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/training-for-child-nutrition-programs

USDA Final Rule: Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (77 FR 4087):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/fr-012612

USDA Final Rule: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (89 FR 31962):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/fr-042524

USDA FNS Instruction 786-8: Reimbursement for Off-Site Meal Consumption:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/schoolmeals/reimbursement-offsite-meal-consumption

USDA Memo SP 05-2022: Meal Requirements Under the NSLP & SBP: Q&A for Program Operators Updated to Support the Transitional Standards Effective July 1, 2022:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/sp052022-questions-answers-program-operators

USDA Memo SP 17-2012: Procurement Questions and Answers to Assist in the Implementation of the final rule titled Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Program.
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/procurement-qas-assist-implementation-final-rule



Glossary

Administrative Review (AR): The state agency's comprehensive offsite and onsite evaluation of all SFAs participating in the NSLP and SBP. The review cycle is every three years for each SFA and includes a review of critical and general areas. For more information, visit the CSDE's Administrative Review for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Afterschool Snack Program (ASP): The USDA's federally assisted snack program implemented through the NSLP. The ASP provides cash reimbursement to help schools serve snacks to children in afterschool activities aimed at promoting the health and well-being of children and youth. Schools must provide children with regularly scheduled activities in an organized, structured, and supervised environment that includes educational or enrichment activities, e.g., mentoring/tutoring programs. Programs must meet state or local licensing requirements and health and safety standards. For more information, visit the CSDE's Afterschool Snack Program webpage.

afterschool snacks: Reimbursable snacks offered in the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP). For more information, refer to "Afterschool Snack Program" in this section.

age/grade groups: The three grade groupings (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) of the USDA's meal breakfast and lunch patterns for grades K-12. The classification of grade groups is based on children's nutritional needs and the ages that typically correspond with these grade levels (ages 5-10 for grades K-5, ages 11-13 for grades 6-8, and ages 14-18 for grades 9-12).

cafeteria-style meal service: A method of meal service where children go through the cafeteria serving line and food service staff serve each child the meal components of their meal. Children may also self-serve some foods, such as selecting a carton of milk or a piece of fresh fruit.

calories: The measurement of energy provided by foods and beverages.

Child Nutrition Programs: The USDA's federally funded programs that provide nutritious meals and snacks to children, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP), Special Milk Program (SMP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The CACFP also provides nutritious meals and snacks to the frail elderly in adult day care centers. For more information, visit the CSDE's Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

Glossary

creditable food: A food or beverage that counts toward meeting the meal pattern requirements for reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

creditable grains: The ingredients in a commercial grain product or standardized recipe that credit toward the grains component. Creditable grains include whole grains, enriched grains, bran, and germ. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Whole Grains in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs*.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans: A federal document that provides science-based advice for Americans ages 2 and older to promote health and reduce risk for chronic diseases through diet and physical activity. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the USDA jointly publish the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* every five years. This document forms the basis of federal food, nutrition education, and information programs. For more information, visit the Dietary Guidelines for Americans webpage.

dietary specifications (apply only to the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12): The USDA's nutrition standards for the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12, that include weekly calorie ranges and weekly limits for saturated fat and sodium. For information on the specific dietary specifications for each grade group, visit the "Dietary Specifications" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage. For guidance on meeting 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*.

> Effective with school year 2026-27 (beginning July 1, 2027), the USDA final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, requires a new weekly dietary specification for added sugars (less than 10 percent of calories). For more information, visit the "Meal Pattern Changes" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

edible portion: The portion of a food that can be eaten after the nonedible parts are removed. Examples include cooked, lean meat without bone, and fruits without seeds or pits.

family-style meal service: A method of meal service that allows children to serve themselves from common platters of food with assistance from supervising adults, if needed.

food item: A specific food offered within the required meal components for reimbursable meals in the USDA's school nutrition programs. A food item may contain one or more meal components or more than one serving of a single component. For example, an entree could provide 1 oz eq of the grains component and 1 oz eq of the MMA component. A 2-ounce whole grain or enriched bagel could provide 2 oz eq of the grains component.

full meal component: The daily quantity designated by the menu planner (no less than the established minimum) to meet the required weekly ranges.

full serving: Refer to "full meal component" in this section.

grade groups: Refer to "age/grade groups" in this section.

local educational agency (LEA): A public board of education or other public or private nonprofit authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public or private nonprofit elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state, or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a state as an administrative agency for its public or private nonprofit elementary schools or secondary schools. The term also includes any other public or private nonprofit institution or agency having administrative control and direction of a public or private nonprofit elementary school or secondary school, including residential child care institutions, Bureau of Indian Affairs schools, and educational service agencies and consortia of those agencies, as well as the state educational agency in a state or territory in which the state educational agency is the sole educational agency for all public or private nonprofit schools.

meal components: The five food groups that comprise reimbursable meals in the NSLP (milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and MMA) and the three food groups that comprise reimbursable breakfasts in the SBP (grains/MMA, fruits with optional vegetable substitutions, and milk). For information on the crediting requirements for each meal component, refer to the CSDE's *Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

meal pattern: The required meal components and minimum servings that schools and institutions participating in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs must provide to receive federal reimbursement for meals and afterschool snacks served to children. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *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.

meals: Refer to "reimbursable meals" in this section.

menu item: Any planned main dish, vegetable, fruit, bread, grain, or milk that is part of the reimbursable meal. Menu items consist of food items. For more information, refer to "food item" in this section.

National School Lunch Program (NSLP): The USDA's federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. The NSLP provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or free lunches to children each school day. The NSLP was established under the National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1946. For more information, visit the CSDE's National School Lunch Program webpage.

nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA): The restricted account in which all the revenue from all food service operations conducted by the SFA, principally for the benefit of school children, is retained and used only for the operation or improvement of the nonprofit school food service. For more information, visit the "Nonprofit School Food Service Account (NSFSA)" section of the CSDE's Financial Management for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

offer versus serve (OVS): A provision that applies to menu planning and the determination of reimbursable meals for grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP. OVS allows students to decline a certain number of meal components or food items in the meal. SFAs must offer the required meal components to each student. For the NSLP, students must select at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving of at least two other meal components. For the SBP, students must select at least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitutions, if offered). OVS must be implemented in senior high schools for lunch but is optional for breakfast. OVS is optional for breakfast and lunch in junior high, middle, and elementary schools. OVS does not apply to the SMP or ASP, or to preschool meals in the NSLP and SBP. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals* and visit the CSDE's Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

overt identification: Any action that may result in a child being recognized as potentially eligible to receive or certified for free or reduced-price meals or afterschool snacks.

point-of-service meal count: The moment in the food service operation where staff can accurately determine that a reimbursable free, reduced-price, or paid meal has been served to an eligible child.

potable water: Water that is safe for human consumption.

pre-plated meal service: A method of meal service where staff pre-plate the minimum portion of each meal component, based on the meal pattern requirements for each grade group.

reimbursable meals: Meals that offer the required meal components and minimum servings for each grade group of the NSLP and SBP meal patterns and are eligible for USDA reimbursement.

residential child care institution (RCCI): RCCIs include but are not limited to homes for the mentally, emotionally or physically impaired, and unmarried mothers and their infants; group homes; halfway houses; orphanages; temporary shelters for abused children and for runaway children; long-term care facilities for chronically ill children; and juvenile detention centers. A long-term care facility is a hospital, skilled nursing facility, intermediate care facility, or distinct part thereof, which is intended for the care of children confined for 30 days or more.

saturated fat: A type of fat that raises blood cholesterol, which is a risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Major sources of saturated fat include coconut oil, palm oil, palm kernel oil, butter, and beef fat. Saturated fat is also found in other animal fats, such as pork and chicken fats, and in other plant fats, such as nuts. For more information, refer to "solid fats" in this section.

School Breakfast Program (SBP): The USDA's federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. The SBP provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost, or free breakfasts to children each school day. The SBP was established under the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 to ensure that all children have access to a healthy breakfast at school to promote learning readiness and healthy eating behaviors. For more information, visit the CSDE's School Breakfast Program webpage.

school food authority (SFA): The governing body that is responsible for the administration of one or more schools and has the legal authority to operate the USDA's school nutrition programs.

school nutrition programs: The USDA's school nutrition programs include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP, Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, Special Milk Program (SMP), Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) At-risk Supper Program implemented in schools. For more information, visit the CSDE's School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP: The USDA's federally assisted summer feeding program that combines features of the NSLP, SBP, and SFSP, and serves meals free of charge to children ages 18 and younger from low-income areas. School districts participating in the NSLP or SBP are eligible to apply to the CSDE to participate in the SSO. SSO meals follow the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. For more information, visit the Seamless Summer Option of the NSLP webpage.

serving size or portion: The weight, measure, number of pieces, or slices of a food or beverage. SFAs must provide the minimum serving sizes specified in the USDA meal patterns for meals and afterschool snacks to be reimbursable.

sodium: *A* mineral that helps maintain the body's fluid balance and blood pressure. Diets that are high in sodium can increase the risk of high blood pressure in individuals who are sodium sensitive.

standard operating procedure (SOP): A detailed explanation of how to implement a policy through specific practices or tasks. SOPs standardize the process and provide step-by-step instructions that enable everyone to perform the task in a consistent manner. This ensures that all staff follow the same procedures each time. For examples of SOPs, visit the Institute of Child Nutrition's Standard Operating Procedures webpage.

CONNECTICUT
Education