

Weekly Calorie Ranges for School Meals for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

The [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#) (Public Law 111-296) updated the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal patterns for grades K-12 to include nutrition standards (known as dietary specifications) that reflect current dietary science based on the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). The purpose of these dietary specifications is to provide nutrient-dense school meals that help combat the dual problems of childhood obesity and hunger.

The dietary specifications for grades K-12 require weekly age-appropriate calorie ranges (minimum and maximum levels) and limits for saturated fats and sodium. In addition, all food products and ingredients used to prepare school meals must contain zero grams of trans fats per serving, as indicated by the Nutrition Facts label or manufacturer’s specifications. For additional guidance on the dietary specifications, refer to “[Section 6 – Dietary Specifications](#)” of the CSDE’s [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12](#). Training on the dietary specifications is available in [Module 5: Dietary Specifications](#) of the CSDE’s training program, [What’s in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#).

Weekly Calorie Ranges for School Meals

Table 1 summarizes the weekly calorie ranges for the allowable grade groups of the NSLP and SBP meal patterns. School meals offered on average over the week must be within the specific calorie range for each grade group. Individual meals offered may be above or below the calorie range. The calorie ranges do not apply to meals selected by individual students. Student selections may be above or below the weekly ranges.

Table 1. Weekly calorie ranges for grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP		
Grade group	Breakfast	Lunch
K-5	350-500	550-650
6-8	400-550	600-700
9-12	450-600	750-850
K-8 option ¹	400-500	600-650
6-12 option ¹	450-550	Not applicable ²
K-12 option ¹	450-500	Not applicable ²
<p>¹ These meal pattern options are available because the calories for these grade groups overlap. They require a narrower calorie range and more restrictive sodium limit.</p> <p>² These meal pattern options are not available for grades K-12 because the required calorie ranges for grades 6-8 and grades 9-12 do not overlap.</p>		

Weekly Calorie Ranges for School Meals for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP

Modifying School Meals to Meet the Weekly Calorie Ranges

The daily and weekly servings of each food component in the [NSLP and SBP meal patterns](#) are intended to meet the minimum and maximum calories for each grade group. Depending on the types and quantities of foods offered in school meals, school food authorities (SFAs) may need to modify school menus to increase or decrease calories. For detailed guidance on modifying menus, refer to “Section 6 – Dietary Specifications” of the CSDE’s *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12*.

Resources

Dietary Specifications (Nutrition Standards for School Meals) (CSDE’s Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

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

Fact Sheet: Calories in School Meals (USDA):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/fact-sheet-calories-school-meals>

Legislation and Regulations for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Laws-and-Regulations-for-Child-Nutrition-Programs>

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

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

Menu Planning for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

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

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

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

National School Lunch Program (CSDE webpage):

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

Nutrition Standards for School Meals (USDA webpage):

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

Nutrition Standards in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (Final Rule 77 FR 4087):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-012612>

Resources for the School Meal Patterns (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Meal_Pattern/Resources_School_Meal_Patterns_grades_K-12.pdf

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School Breakfast Program (CSDE):

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

USDA Memo SP 38-2019: Meal Requirements under the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program: Questions and Answers for Program Operators (see “Calories and Trans Fat”):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/meal-requirements-under-national-school-lunch-program-and-school-breakfast-program>

USDA Regulations 7 CFR Part 210: National School Lunch Program:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-210>

USDA Regulations 7 CFR Part 220: School Breakfast Program:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-220>

What’s in a Meal Module 5: Dietary Specifications (CSDE’s Training Program, What’s in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Meal-Pattern-Training-Materials>

For more resources, visit the “[Dietary Specifications \(Nutrition Standards for School Meals\)](#)” section of the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Weekly Calorie Ranges for School Meals for Grades K-12 in the NSLP and SBP



For more information, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *Menu Planning Guide for School Meals for Grades K-12* and visit the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

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

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