Weekly Calorie Ranges for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

This guidance applies to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) meal patterns for grades K-12.

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Overview of Dietary Specifications for School Meals

The USDA NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 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. Effective July 1, 2027, the USDA final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, requires a new dietary specification for added sugars in school meals (less than 10 percent of calories) and the final sodium limits apply.

For additional guidance on the dietary specifications, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12* and visit the "Dietary Specifications" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage. Training on the dietary specifications is available in Module 6: Dietary Specifications of the CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*.

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.

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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	400-500	600-650
6-12 option	450-550	Not applicable
K-12 option	450-500	Not applicable

The USDA allows optional meal patterns for grades K-8 at breakfast and lunch and grades 6-12 and grades K-12 at breakfast because the required meal pattern servings and dietary specifications for these grade groups overlap. However, these meal pattern options require a narrower calorie range and more restrictive sodium limit than the regular meal patterns. Optional meal patterns are not available for grades 6-12 or grades K-12 at lunch because the required calorie ranges for grades 6-8 and grades 9-12 do not overlap.

Modifying School Meals to Meet the Weekly Calorie Ranges

The daily and weekly servings of each meal component in the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 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 the CSDE's *Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12*.

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Resources

Calories ("Dietary Specifications" section of 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#Calories

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

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

National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Regulations 7 CFR 210.10(f)(1): Calories:
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-210#p-210.10(f)(1)

Nutrition Standards for School Meals (USDA webpage):
https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/nutrition-standards-school-meals

School Breakfast Program (SBP) Regulations 7 CFR 220.8(f)(1): Calories:
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-220#p-220.8(f)(1)

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

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

USDA Memo SP 05-2022: Meal Requirements Under the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program: Questions and Answers for Program Operators Updated to Support the Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Effective July 1, 2022:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/sp052022-questions-answers-program-operators

For more information, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) 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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