National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
Five-day Lunch Meal Pattern for Grades 6-8

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

Meal components [1]	**Daily**	**Weekly**
Milk, fluid, cups [2]	1	5
Fruits, cups [3] Fruit juice cannot exceed half of weekly fruits [4]	½	2½
Vegetables, cups [5] Vegetable juice cannot exceed half of weekly vegetables [4]	¾	3¾
Dark green [6]	0	½
Red/orange [7]	0	¾
Beans, peas, and lentils [8]	0	½
Starchy [9]	0	½
Other [10]	0	½
Additional vegetables to reach total [11]	0	1
Grains, ounce equivalents (oz eq) [12] Must be whole grain-rich (WGR) (at least 80 percent per week) or enriched (cannot exceed 20 percent per week) [13]	1	8-10
Meats/meat alternates (MMA), oz eq [14]	1	9-10

Dietary specifications (nutrition standards):
Daily amount based on the average for a five-day week

Nutrition standards	**Weekly Average**
Calories [15]	600-700
Saturated fat (percentage of total calories)	< 10
Sodium (milligrams): Target 1A through June 30, 2027	≤ 1,225

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Menu Planning Notes

[1] Lunches must include the minimum daily and weekly servings of the five meal components and may include larger amounts if the weekly menu meets the dietary specifications. Use the USDA's Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (FBG) to determine how foods credit and the amount that provides the required meal pattern serving. Commercial processed foods not listed in the FBG require a Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS) to document crediting information. School food authorities (SFAs) must verify PFS forms for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the product in reimbursable meals. Foods made from scratch must have a standardized recipe that documents the crediting information per serving. For information on crediting documentation, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) resources, *Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs*, *Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs*, and *Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs*, and visit the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage. The CSDE's What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs training program provides comprehensive guidance on meeting the NSLP meal pattern and crediting requirements.

[2] Effective January 14, 2026, the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 revised the allowable types of milk for lunch to include whole and reduced fat (2%) milk, in addition to the previously allowed low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk. These types of milk may be unflavored or flavored (cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces). Allowable types of milk also include lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk, acidified milk, cultured milk, cultured buttermilk, and Ultra High Temperature (UHT). SFAs may choose which types of milk to offer but must serve a variety of milk, i.e., at least two different choices of fat content or flavor, including at least one unflavored choice. For children whose dietary needs do not constitute a disability, SFAs may choose to offer optional nondairy milk substitutes (such as soy milk) that meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes (7 CFR 210.10(d)(2)(ii)). For guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs*. For more information, visit the "Milk" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[3] The fruits component includes fresh, frozen, and dried fruits, canned fruit in juice, water, or light syrup, and pasteurized 100 percent full-strength fruit juice. Fruits credit based on volume (cups), except dried fruits credit as twice the volume served, e.g., ¼ cup of raisins credits as ½ cup of the fruits component. For more information, visit the "Fruits" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[4] Fruit and vegetable juices must be pasteurized 100 percent juices. Fruit juices cannot exceed half of the weekly fruit offerings. Vegetable juices cannot exceed half of the weekly vegetable offerings. The juice limit includes all fruit and vegetable juices, frozen pops made from 100 percent juice, and pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Juices in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Crediting Smoothies in the School Nutrition Programs*.

[5] The vegetables component includes fresh, frozen, canned, and rehydrated dried vegetables, and pasteurized 100 percent vegetable juice. Vegetables credit based on volume (cups), except raw leafy greens credit as half the volume served, e.g., 1 cup of lettuce or spinach credits as ½ cup of the vegetables component. A serving of canned vegetables must be drained. Dried vegetables (such as potato flakes and dried soup mix) credit based on their rehydrated volume and require a PFS. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program*, and visit the "Vegetables" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[6] Examples of the dark green subgroup include arugula, bok choy, broccoli, collard greens, dark green leafy lettuce, kale, mesclun, mustard greens, romaine lettuce, spinach, turnip greens, and watercress.

[7] Examples of the red/orange subgroup include acorn squash, butternut squash, carrots, orange peppers, pumpkin, red peppers, spaghetti squash, tomatoes, tomato juice, sweet potatoes, and winter squash.

[8] Examples of the beans, peas, and lentils subgroup include black beans, black-eyed peas (mature, dry), garbanzo beans (chickpeas), kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, refried beans, soybeans, split peas, and white beans. Note: Green peas, green lima beans, and green (string) beans are not in this subgroup. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils in the School Nutrition Programs*.

[9] Examples of the starchy subgroup include black-eyed peas (not dry), corn, cassava, green bananas, green peas, green lima beans, parsnips, plantains, taro, water chestnuts, and white potatoes.

[10] The "other" subgroup includes all other vegetables such as artichokes, asparagus, avocado, beets, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, eggplant, green beans, green peppers, iceberg lettuce, mushrooms, okra, onions, turnips, wax beans, and zucchini. The "other" vegetables requirement may be met with any additional amounts from the dark green subgroup, red/orange subgroup, and beans, peas, and lentils subgroup, but not the starchy subgroup.

[11] Any vegetable subgroup may be offered as additional vegetables to meet the total weekly vegetable requirements.

[12] The weekly grains oz eq must be at least the minimum oz eq but may exceed the maximum oz eq. The maximum oz eq provide a guide for meeting the weekly dietary specifications. Grain products and standardized recipes must provide the required serving weight (groups A-E) or volume (groups H-I) in the USDA's Exhibit A chart (refer to the CSDE's resources, *Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs* and *How to Use the Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs*) or provide the minimum creditable grains (refer to the CSDE's resources, *Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents for the Meal Patterns for*

School Nutrition Programs and *When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs*). For more information, visit the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[13] At least 80 percent of the weekly offered grains oz eq must be WGR (refer to the CSDE's resources, *Calculating the Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12* and *Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*). Grains that are not WGR must be enriched and cannot exceed 20 percent of the weekly offered grains oz eq (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs*). Foods in groups A-G (baked goods) and group H (cereal grains like rice, pasta, and quinoa) must meet two WGR criteria: 1) the grain content is between 50 and 100 percent whole grain with any remaining grains being enriched; and 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 6.99 grams per portion. Cooked breakfast cereals (group H) and RTE breakfast cereals (group I) must meet three WGR criteria: 1) the first ingredient is a whole grain and the cereal is fortified, or the cereal is 100 percent whole grain; 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 6.99 grams per portion; and 3) added sugars do not exceed 6 grams of per dry ounce (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the School Nutrition Programs*). Breakfast cereals that are not WGR must be enriched or fortified and cannot exceed 6.99 grams of noncreditable grains per portion. Fortification is not required for 100 percent whole-grain cereals.

[14] MMA must be served in a main dish or a main dish and one other food item. The weekly MMA oz eq must be at least the minimum oz eq but may exceed the maximum oz eq. The maximum oz eq provide a guide for meeting the weekly dietary specifications. The serving size refers to the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish, e.g., cooked lean meat without bone, breading, binders, extenders, or other ingredients. One oz eq equals 1 ounce of lean meat, poultry, or fish; 1 ounce of cheese; 2 ounces of cottage or ricotta cheese; ¼ cup of beans, pea, or lentils (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils in the School Nutrition Programs*); ½ large egg; 2 tablespoons of nut or seed butters (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs*); 1 ounce of nuts or seeds, e.g., almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, filberts, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, walnuts, pine nuts, pistachios, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, and soy nuts; ¼ cup (2.2 ounces) of commercial tofu containing at least 5 grams of protein (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the School Nutrition Programs*); 1 ounce of tempeh; 3 ounces of surimi; ½ cup of yogurt or soy yogurt that contains no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces, i.e., no more than 2 grams of added sugars per ounce (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Yogurt in the School Nutrition Programs*); and 1 ounce of alternate protein products (APPs) that meet the USDA requirements in appendix A of 7 CFR 210 (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the School Nutrition Programs*). Commercial processed MMA products (such as combination entrees like breakfast pizza and egg sandwiches, deli meats, and sausages) require a CN label or PFS to document crediting information (refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Crediting Deli*

Meats in the School Nutrition Programs). For more information, visit the "Meats and Meat Alternates" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[15] The weekly lunch menu's average daily calories must be at least the minimum but cannot exceed the maximum. For more information 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.

For more information on the NSLP meal patterns, visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage, Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage, and Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 webpage, or contact the school nutrition programs staff at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/nslp_meal_pattern_5day_grades_6-8.pdf.

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Five-day Lunch Meal Patterns for Grades 6-8

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