Overview of Offer Versus Serve (OVS) in the National School Lunch Program

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

This document provides guidance on the OVS requirements for school food authorities (SFAs) that implement OVS for grades K-12 in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Sponsors of the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP that implement OVS must follow the same requirements.

Detailed guidance on OVS is available in the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals*. For additional resources, visit the CSDE's Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs webpage.



Overview of OVS in the National School Lunch Program

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Overview of OVS in the National School Lunch Program

Overview of OVS at Lunch

The requirements for implementing OVS at lunch are defined in 7 CFR 210.10(e) of the USDA's NSLP regulations. OVS is a concept that applies to menu planning and the determination of reimbursable meals for grades K-12 in the NSLP and School Breakfast Program (SBP). It allows students to decline a certain number of meal components in the meal and select the foods they prefer to eat, while reducing food cost and waste.

Required meals for OVS

OVS must be implemented at lunch in senior high schools but is optional for all other grades. The USDA encourages schools to use the OVS flexibility at lunch 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.

OVS is optional for all grades at breakfast. For guidance on implementing OVS at breakfast refer to the CSDE's resource, *Overview of Offer Versus Serve (OVS) in the School Breakfast Program*.

OVS is not allowed for the preschool meal patterns (ages 1-5) or for the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP.

Lunch menus must meet NSLP meal pattern requirements

For reimbursable lunches with OVS, the SFA's lunch menu must meet all daily and weekly requirements of the NSLP meal pattern for grades K-12.

> SFAs must offer lunches that meet the NSLP daily and weekly meal pattern requirements. Lunch menus that do not meet these requirements are not reimbursable.

- **Daily requirements:** The daily lunch menu must offer the minimum serving of the five meal components. These include milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats/meat alternates (MMA). For more information on the meal components, refer to "Overview of Lunch Meal Components" in this document
- **Weekly requirements for grains and MMA** The weekly lunch menu must offer the minimum ounce equivalents (oz eq) of the grains component and the MMA component for each grade group. SFAs must serve additional grains and MMA on some days to meet the weekly requirements for grades K-5 and 6-8. Serving only the minimum daily

1 oz eq of grains and only the minimum daily 1 oz eq of MMA will not meet the weekly requirements for these grade groups. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*.

- **Other weekly requirements:** The weekly lunch menu must meet the whole grain-rich (WGR) requirement (at least 80 percent of weekly grains must be WGR); the weekly juice limit for the fruits component (fruit juices cannot exceed half of all fruits); the weekly juice limit for the vegetables component (vegetable juices cannot exceed half of all vegetables); the minimum weekly servings of the five vegetable subgroups; and the weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium.

OVS applies to the daily meal pattern requirements. SFAs must offer all five meal components in at least the full serving (minimum daily amount) for each grade group. 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.

Terms to know

The definitions of food items and meal components for lunch are different from breakfast. Food items are also credited differently at breakfast.

- A **meal component** is one of the five food groups that comprise the reimbursable lunch, including milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and MMA.

- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the five meal components. It may contain one or more meal components. For example, a hamburger patty (MMA component) on a whole-grain bun (grains component) is one food item that contains two meal components. A selection of three different ½-cup servings of fruit (such as peaches, applesauce, and pears) includes three food items from one meal component (fruits). **Note:** This definition applies only to lunch. Food items credit differently for OVS at breakfast.

- The **full serving** is the minimum amount required for each grade group in the NSLP meal patterns.

SFAs must ensure that menu planners understand how these terms apply to OVS at lunch.







Overview of Lunch Meal Components

SFAs must offer lunches that meet the NSLP meal pattern requirements. SFAs may choose to serve larger amounts of any meal component but must offer at least the minimum meal pattern servings. SFAs must consider the requirements below when planning foods to meet the meal components at lunch.

Milk component

SFAs must offer a variety (at least two different choices) of unflavored or flavored milk. At least one choice must be unflavored milk. Flavored milk cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces. For more information, visit the "Milk Component" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Fruits component

The fruits component includes fresh fruits, frozen fruits, canned fruits (in juice, water, or light syrup), dried fruits, and pasteurized 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 Component" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Fruit juices cannot exceed half of the weekly fruit offerings. This juice limit includes 100 percent juices, frozen pops made from 100 percent juice, and pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies. For guidance on crediting juices and smoothies, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Juices in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Crediting Smoothies in the School Nutrition Programs*.

Each school's lunch menu and cafeteria signage must clearly communicate the amount of fruit and vegetable juices that students may select with each meal. Some examples of acceptable language include "choose two fruits or one fruit and one juice" and "choose up to two fruits (no more than one juice)." This type of language must be indicated on school menus and in signage on the serving line where the fruits and vegetables are located.

Vegetables component

The vegetables component includes fresh vegetables, frozen vegetables, canned vegetables, rehydrated dried vegetables, and pasteurized 100 percent full-strength vegetable juices. Vegetable juice cannot exceed half of the weekly vegetable offerings.

Vegetables credit based on volume (cups), except raw leafy greens credit as half the volume served, e.g., 1 cup credits as ½ cup of vegetables. A serving of cooked vegetables must be

drained. Dried vegetables (such as potato flakes and dried soup mix) credit based on their rehydrated volume and require a product formulation statement (PFS). Pureed vegetables in smoothies credit only as juice. For more information, visit the "Vegetables Component" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

The NSLP meal pattern requires minimum weekly servings of five vegetable subgroups (dark green, red/orange, starchy, legumes, and other). Students are not required to select each subgroup, but SFAs must provide the opportunity for students to select each subgroup. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program*.

Grains component

Lunch menus must meet the grains component requirements below.

- All grains must be WGR or enriched and cannot exceed the limit for noncreditable grains (no more than 3.99 grams per portion for groups A-G and no more than 6.99 grams per portion for groups H-I). Groups A-I refer to the USDA's *Exhibit A: Grain Requirements for Child Nutrition Programs*. The CSDE's resource, *Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs*, indicates the applicable Exhibit A quantities and requirements. For information on noncredible grains refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12*.

- At least 80 percent of the grain menu items offered in the weekly lunch menu must be WGR, based on the total ounce equivalents of offered grains. For more information on the WGR requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*. Additional resources are available under "Whole Grain-rich Requirement" in the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

- Enriched grains cannot exceed 20 percent of the total grains offered each week. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs*.

- SFAs must document that commercial grain products and grain foods made from scratch provide the required oz eq or minimum creditable grains. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs* and *Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents in the School Nutrition Programs*.

For more information,visit the "Grains Component" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

MMA component

The MMA component must be served in the main dish, or in the main dish and only one other food item. The meal pattern servings refer to the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish, e.g., cooked lean meat without bone, breading, binders, extenders, or other ingredients. For more information, visit the "Meats/Meat Alternates Component" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Commercial processed MMA products require a Child Nutrition (CN) label or PFS to document crediting information. Some examples include combination entrees (e.g., pizza, breaded chicken nuggets, and hummus); foods with added liquids, binders, and extenders (e.g., deli meats, hot dogs, and sausages); dried meat, poultry, and seafood products (e.g., jerky and summer sausages); and alternate protein products (APPs). For more 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*.



Overview of OVS in the National School Lunch Program

OVS Menu Planning Requirements for Lunch

SFAs must meet the menu planning criteria below for lunches to be reimbursable under OVS. SFAs should plan Lunch menus to make it easy for students to select reimbursable meals and simple for food service staff to identify reimbursable meals at the point of service.

> The point of service 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 an eligible child. This is typically at the end of the serving line after the child has had the chance to receive all meal components of the reimbursable meal.

Menu planning

Lunch menus must include the minimum daily serving of the five meal components for each grade group. The grains, fruits, and vegetables components may be offered in more than one food item. The MMA component must be offered as a main dish, or a main dish and one other food item. Milk must be offered as the full 1-cup serving.

For information on the NSLP meal patterns, visit the "Lunch Meal Patterns" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage and refer to the CSDE's *Guide to the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*. For information on the crediting requirements for foods and beverages, visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage and Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

Offering a meal component as two different servings

If the lunch menu offers the minimum serving of a meal component as two separate foods, students must take both foods to count as one meal component for OVS. For example, a lunch menu for grades 9-12 provides the required 2 oz eq of MMA from ½ cup of low-fat yogurt (1 oz eq) and 1 ounce of low-fat cheese (1 oz eq). Students must select both foods to count as the MMA component for OVS. The yogurt or cheese stick alone does not count as the MMA component because each serving is less than 2 oz eq (the minimum serving for grades 9-12).

Tables 1 and 2 show how this requirement applies to each meal component for each grade group.

Table 1. Offering full meal component as two food items for grades K-5 and 6-8

Planned menu items (meal component and minimum daily amount)	Required student selection for full meal component (minimum daily amount)
Fruits ½ cup ¼ cup of peaches ¼ cup of grapes	Students must take both food items to count as the full serving of the fruits component. For a reimbursable meal, students could select ¼ cup of fruit if they also select at least ½ cup of vegetable and the full serving of at least two other meal components.
Vegetables ¾ cup ½ cup of carrots ¼ cup of tomatoes	Students must take both food items to count as the full serving of the vegetables component. The carrots meet the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. For a reimbursable meal, students could select ½ cup of carrots if they also select the full serving of at least two other meal components, one of which could be ½ cup of fruit. Students could select ¼ cup of tomatoes if they also select at least ¼ cup of fruit and the full serving of at least two other meal components.
MMA 1 oz eq 1 tablespoon of peanut butter (½ oz eq) ¼ cup of yogurt (½ oz eq)	Students must take both food items to count as the full serving of the MMA component. For a reimbursable meal, students could select either the peanut butter or yogurt alone if they also select at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable and the full serving of at least two other meal components.
Grains 1 oz eq Two packages of whole-grain crackers (½ oz eq each)	Students must take both food items to count as the full serving of the grains component. For a reimbursable meal, students could select one package of crackers if they also select at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable and the full serving of at least two other meal components.

Table 2. Offering full meal component as two food items for grades 9-12

Planned menu items (meal component and minimum daily amount)	Required student selection for full meal component (minimum daily amount)
Fruits 1 cup ½ cup of peaches ½ cup of grapes	Students must take both food items to count as the full serving of the fruits component. However, each ½-cup serving meets the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. For a reimbursable meal, students could select ½ cup of fruit if they also select the full serving of at least two other meal components, one of which could be 1 cup of vegetable. [1]
Vegetables 1 cup ½ cup of green peppers ½ cup of tomatoes	Students must take both food items to count as the full serving of the vegetables component. However, each ½-cup serving meets the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. For a reimbursable meal, students could select ½ cup of vegetable if they also select the full serving of at least two other meal components, one of which could be 1 cup of fruit. [1]
MMA 2 oz eq ½ cup of low-fat yogurt (1 oz eq) 1 ounce low-fat cheese stick (1 oz eq)	Students must take both food items to count as the full serving of the MMA component. For a reimbursable meal, students could select either the yogurt or cheese stick alone if they also select at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable and the full serving of at least two other meal components.
Grains 2 oz eq ½ cup of whole grain-rich pasta (1 oz eq) 1 ounce whole-grain roll (1 oz eq)	Students must take both food items to count as the full serving of the grains component. For a reimbursable meal, students could select either the pasta or roll alone if they also select at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable and the full serving of at least two other meal components.

[1] SFAs must provide clear signage to inform students that they may select one or two fruit servings and one or two vegetable servings (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Signage Requirements for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*).

Offering larger servings

SFAs may serve larger amounts of any meal component if the weekly lunch menu does not exceed the USDA's dietary specifications (nutrition standards) for calories, saturated fat, and sodium (and effective July 1, 2027, the new dietary specification for added sugars). For information 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* and visit the "Dietary Specifications" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Unit pricing

Meals must be priced as a unit. Students pay the same price regardless of whether they select three, four, or five meal components.

SFAs must establish one price for a complete reimbursable lunch in the paid meal category and one price for a complete reimbursable lunch in the reduced-price meal category. SFAs may set different unit prices (tiered pricing) for various combinations of foods offered as a reimbursable lunch. However, all students, including those eligible for free and reduced-price meals, must be allowed to select any reimbursable lunch. Lunches with a higher unit price must be available at no cost for all free-eligible students, and at no more than 40 cents for all reduced-eligible students.

Required signage

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

- **Identify all planned reimbursable lunches:** The first type of signage must identify all planned reimbursable lunches (i.e., all offered full meals), including the 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.

- **Identify what students must select for reimbursable meals with OVS:** The second type of signage must indicate what food items and amounts students may select for a reimbursable lunch 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 ½-cup servings of all fruit and vegetable choices for grades 9-12, the lunch menu and cafeteria signage must indicate that students may select up to two servings of fruits (1 cup total) and two servings of vegetables (1 cup total) 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 "Required Signage for OVS" section of the CSDE's OVS webpage.

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

Required student selections

Students must select at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving of at least two other meal components. A student's selection of less than ½ cup of fruits or vegetables does not count toward the OVS requirements.

> Offering all fruits and vegetables in ½-cup servings is a best practice to encourage students' selections of reimbursable meals.

Declining foods

Students may decline any one or two of the required meal components, except for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. Students may take smaller portions of the declined meal components. However, selections of less than the full serving do not count toward the OVS requirements. For example, a lunch menu for grades K-5 provides the required 1 oz eq of grains from ½ oz eq of brown rice and ½ oz eq whole-grain roll. Students must select both items to count as the grains component for OVS. The brown rice or roll alone do not count as the grains component because each serving is less than 1 oz eq (the minimum daily serving).

Selecting more than the full serving

SFAs may allow students to select more than the full serving of any meal component. However, student selections of additional servings from the same meal component count as only one meal component for OVS.

For example, a lunch menu for grades 9-12 provides 3 oz eq of grains from 1 cup of brown rice (2 oz eq) and a 1-ounce whole-grain roll (1 oz eq). If a student selects both food items, they count as only one meal component (grains) for OVS. For a reimbursable meal, the student must also select at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving of at least one other meal component.

Examples of OVS at Lunch

The examples below show how to implement OVS at lunch. SFAs must offer the full serving of all five meal components. Students must select at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving of at least two other meal components.

Example 1: OVS at lunch for grades K-5 and 6-8

Planned lunch menu	Meal components
Turkey Sandwich (1 ounce turkey and 1 ounce low-fat cheese)	MMA 2 oz eq
Whole-wheat bread, 2 slices (1 ounce each)	Grains 2 oz eq
Broccoli florets, ¾ cup	Vegetables ¾ cup
Cantaloupe wedges, ½ cup	Fruits ½ cup
Choice of milk, 1 cup	Milk 1 cup

Student selects	Reimbursable meal: At least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruits/vegetables
Turkey sandwich Milk	No. The meal contains three full meal components (MMA, grains, and milk) but is missing at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable.
Turkey sandwich Cantaloupe	Yes. The meal contains three full meal components (MMA, grains, and fruits).
Turkey sandwich Broccoli	Yes. The meal contains three full meal components (MMA, grains, and vegetables).
Broccoli Cantaloupe Milk	Yes. The meal contains three full meal components (vegetables, fruits, and milk).
Turkey sandwich Broccoli Milk	Yes. The meal contains four full meal components (MMA, grains, vegetables, and milk).
Turkey sandwich Cantaloupe Milk	Yes. The meal contains four full meal components (MMA, grains, fruits, and milk).

Example 2: OVS at lunch for grades 9-12

Planned lunch menu	Meal components
Yogurt, 1 cup	MMA 2 oz eq
Whole-grain crackers, 2 ounces	Grains 2 oz eq
Carrot sticks, ½ cup	Vegetables ½ cup
Sliced peppers, ½ cup	Vegetables ½ cup
Fruit salad, 1 cup	Fruits 1 cup
Choice of milk, 1 cup	Milk 1 cup

Student selects	Reimbursable meal: At least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruits/vegetables
Yogurt Fruit salad Crackers	Yes. The meal contains three full meal components (MMA, fruits, and grains).
Yogurt Crackers Milk	No. The meal contains three full meal components (MMA, grains, and milk) but is missing at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable.
Crackers Carrot sticks Sliced peppers	No. The meal contains only two full meal components (crackers and vegetables) and requires a third component. The vegetable servings count as either the full component or the ½ cup OVS requirement but not both (refer to table 2).
Crackers Fruit salad Milk	Yes. The meal contains three full meal components (grains, fruits and milk).
Crackers Fruit salad Sliced peppers Milk	Yes. The meal contains three full meal components (grains, fruits, and milk) and ½ cup of vegetable.
Crackers Carrot sticks Sliced peppers Milk	Yes. The meal contains three full meal components (grains, vegetables, and milk).

Strategies for Successful OVS Implementation

The three critical elements for successful OVS implementation include strategic menu planning, clear communication, and staff training. The following guidelines help SFAs incorporate these elements for successful OVS implementation.

Menu planning

SFAs decide how to offer the required meal components for OVS at lunch. These decisions are important because they determine what foods and amounts students must take for a reimbursable meal with OVS. SFAs can increase the likelihood that students will select reimbursable meals by using menu planning strategies that encourage students to take at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving (minimum daily amount) of at least two other meal components.

SFAs should be consistent with menu planning and crediting foods to help minimize confusion among students and school food service staff. For example, decide whether to credit chickpeas in a salad as the vegetables component or the MMA component, then credit them the same way for all lunch menus. Consistent crediting makes it easier for students to understand what foods they can choose and helps staff to identify reimbursable meals.

The best practices strategies below for MMA, grains, fruits, and vegetables help simplify the menu planning process, make it easier for students to select reimbursable breakfasts with OVS, and make it simpler for school food service staff to identify reimbursable breakfasts at the point of service.

Strategies for MMA and grains

- **Offer combination entrees:** Offer combination entrees (such as pizza and a cheeseburger on a bun) that provide the full serving of the grains component and MMA component. Students who choose the entree have already selected two full meal components and only need to select at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables for a reimbursable meal.

- **Offer components as one food item:** Offer the full serving of the grains component and MMA component as one food item instead of two, so any student selection counts as a full meal component for OVS. For example, offer a 2-oz eq package of WGR crackers for grades 9-12 instead of two 1-oz eq packages.

- **Package foods with less than the full serving together:** When a food item is less than the full serving of the grains component or MMA component, package it together with another food item from the same meal component so students must take both. For

example, wrap a 1-oz eq yogurt (½ cup) and a 1-oz eq cheese stick together to provide 2 oz eq of MMA for grades 9-12, or wrap two ½-oz eq packages of crackers together to provide 1 oz eq of grains for grades K-5 and 6-8.

Strategies for fruits and vegetables

- **Offer all vegetable choices in ½-cup servings:** Offer all grades a variety of vegetables in ½-cup servings and allow students to select up to two servings. This makes it easier for students to meet the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. **Note:** This menu planning approach provides an additional ¼ cup of daily vegetables for grades K-5 and 6-8. SFAs may serve larger amounts of any meal component if the menu does not exceed the weekly dietary specifications (refer to "Larger servings" in this document).

- **Offer all fruits in ½-cup servings:** Offer all grades a variety of fruits in ½-cup servings. Allow students in grades K-5 and 6-8 to select at least one serving. Allow students in grades 9-12 to select at least two servings. This makes it easier for students to meet the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables.

- **Plan fruit and vegetable choices to meet the weekly juice limit:** Review lunch menus for compliance with the weekly juice limit (refer to "Fruits component" and "Vegetables component" in this document). Provide clear information on lunch menus and cafeteria signage that instructs students on the amount of juice they can select with each lunch.

Communication

SFAs must clearly communicate the daily menu options to food service staff and students. Lunch menus and cafeteria signage must indicate how much food to select from each component for a reimbursable meal (refer to "Required signage" in this document). Food service staff must understand the OVS requirements and be able to accurately identify reimbursable meals at the service.

Staff training

OVS training is critical for SFAs to ensure that school food service staff can accurately identify reimbursable meals with OVS. OVS training is most effective when SFAs use actual examples from their own school menus. School food service staff must be able to:

- understand the OVS requirements;
- help students select the quantities of the required food items for reimbursable meals; and
- accurately identify reimbursable meals at the point of service.

Overview of OVS in the National School Lunch Program

Training on the OVS requirements for lunch is available in Module 17: Offer versus Serve (OVS) in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) of the CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*. The knowledge check for Module 17, *Meal or No Meal Lunch Edition,* allows school food service to test their ability to identify reimbursable lunches with OVS.

Training must also ensure that all school food service staff implement correct meal counting and claiming procedures with OVS. For more information, visit the CSDE's Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Job-specific training is also required for non-food service employees whose responsibilities include duties related to the operation of school nutrition programs, such as teachers, teachers' aides, and other applicable staff who conduct in-classroom meal counting and claiming. For guidance on OVS with classroom meals, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Requirements for Classroom Meals in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*.

Frequency

SFAs should conduct OVS training at least annually for servers, cashiers, and other applicable food service staff. Training is also important whenever changes occur to the school nutrition programs, such as new staff, new grade configurations, and new menu items.

Professional standards

OVS training meets the USDA's professional standards requirements for annual training. OVS is listed under the subcategory of "Serving Food (2200)" for the key area of "Operations (2000)" in the USDA's list of training topics for professional standards: 2220 Offer versus Serve and 2240 Serving Lines. For more information, refer to the USDA's Professional Standards Learning Objectives & Training Topics webpage and the USDA's *Guide to Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs*, and visit the CSDE's Professional Standards for School Nutrition Professionals webpage.

Pre-service meetings

In addition to regular OVS training, a recommended best practice for cafeteria managers is to conduct a daily pre-service meeting with all applicable staff to review each menu choice and what students must select for a reimbursable meal. This helps to ensure that all staff (including substitutes) can accurately identify reimbursable meals.

Resources

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 Guide for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/mpg/guide_crediting_snp.pdf

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/fbg/food-buying-guide

Knowledge Check for What's in a Meal Module 18: Offer versus Serve (OVS) in the School Breakfast Program (SBP): Meal or No Meal Breakfast Edition (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#module18

Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-counting-and-claiming-for-school-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 Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning-guidance-for-school-meals

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.fns.usda.gov/tn/nslp/offer-versus-serve-posters

Requirements for Classroom Meals in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/mealcount/requirements_classroom_meals_nslp_sbp.pdf

Overview of OVS in the National School Lunch Program

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 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 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 35-2011 and CACFP 23-2011: Clarification on the Use of Offer versus Serve and Family Style Meal Service:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/clarification-use-offer-vs-serve-and-family-style-meal-service

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)

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 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 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/sde/nutrition/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/ovs/overview_ovs_nslp.pdf.

Overview of OVS in the National School Lunch Program

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

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