Overview of Offer Versus Serve (OVS) in the School Breakfast 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) School Breakfast Program (SBP). Sponsors of the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) that implement OVS at breakfast 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.



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Introduction to OVS at Breakfast

The requirements for implementing OVS for breakfast are defined in 7 CFR 220.8(e) of the USDA's SBP regulations. OVS is a concept 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 food items in the meal and select the foods they prefer to eat, while reducing food cost and waste.

Allowed meals for OVS

OVS is optional for all grades at breakfast. The USDA encourages schools to use the OVS flexibility at 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.

At lunch, OVS must be implemented in senior high schools but is optional for all other grades. For guidance on implementing OVS at lunch refer to the CSDE's resource, *Overview of Offer Versus Serve in the National School Lunch Program*.

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

Breakfast menus must meet SBP meal pattern requirements

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

> SFAs must offer breakfasts that meet the SBP daily and weekly meal pattern requirements. Breakfast menus that do not meet these requirements are not reimbursable.

- **Daily requirements:** The daily breakfast menu must offer the minimum serving of at least four food items from the three breakfast meal components, which include milk, fruits (including vegetable substitutions), and a combined grains and meats/meat alternates (MMA) component. For more information on the meal components, refer "Overview of Breakfast Meal Components" in this document.

- **Weekly requirements for grains/MMA:** The weekly breakfast menu must offer the minimum ounce equivalents (oz eq) of grains/MMA for each grade group. For example, the five-day breakfast meal pattern requires at least 7-10 oz eq per week for grades K-5, at least 8-10 oz eq per week for grades 6-8, and at least 9-10 oz eq per week for grades 9-12. SFAs must serve additional grains/MMA on some days to meet the minimum weekly requirements for each grade group. Serving only the minimum daily 1 oz eq of grains/MMA will not meet the weekly requirements. 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 breakfast menu must meet the whole grain-rich (WGR) requirement (at least 80 percent of weekly grains must be WGR); the weekly juice limit (juices cannot exceed half of all fruits and vegetables); and the weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium.

OVS applies to the daily meal pattern requirements. SFAs must offer four food items from the three meal components in at least the full serving (minimum daily amount) for each grade group. For a reimbursable breakfast under OVS, students must select at least three food items, which must include at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitutions, if offered) and the full serving of at least two other food items.

Terms to know

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

- A **meal component** is one of the three food groups that comprise reimbursable breakfasts, including milk, fruits (including vegetable substitutions), and the combined grains/MMA component.

- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the three breakfast meal components. One food item equals 1 cup of the milk component, ½ cup of the fruits component (including vegetable substitutions), and 1 oz eq of the grains/MMA component. **Note:** This definition applies only to breakfast. Food items credit differently for OVS at lunch.

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

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Overview of Breakfast Meal Components

SFAs must offer breakfasts that meet the SBP 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 breakfast.

Milk component

The minimum serving size is 1 cup, which counts as one food item for OVS.

- SFAs must offer a variety (at least two different choices) of unflavored or flavored milk. At least one milk choice must be unflavored. Flavored milk cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces.

- Students are not required to take milk for a reimbursable meal.

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

Fruits component

The minimum serving size is 1 cup. A ½-cup serving counts as one food item for OVS. Menu planners may also choose to count 1 cup of fruits or vegetables as one food item (refer to "Deciding how to count 1 cup of fruits or vegetables" in this document).

- 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.

- SFAs may substitute vegetables for the fruits component at any breakfast. 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. Effective July 1, 2025, SFAs that choose to offer vegetable substitutions on one day per school week may offer any vegetables. SFAs that choose to offer vegetable substitutions on two or more days per school week must offer vegetables from at least two different subgroups. For more information, refer to "Vegetables at Breakfast" in the "Vegetables" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage and the CSDE's resource, *Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program*.

- Dried fruits credit as twice the volume served. For example, ¼ cup of raisins credits as ½ cup of the fruits component (1 food item).

- Raw leafy greens credit as half the volume served. For example, 1 cup of raw spinach credits as ½ cup of vegetable substitution for the fruits component (1 food item).

- Fruit juices and vegetable juices cannot exceed half of the weekly fruit and vegetable 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*.

- If SFAs offer a variety of daily fruit and juice choices (or vegetable substitutions) to meet the 1-cup requirement, students must be allowed to select two servings. Students may select either two fruits or one fruit and one juice but cannot select two servings of juice because this exceeds the weekly juice limit. Each school's breakfast 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

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

Grains/MMA component

The minimum serving size is 1 oz eq, which counts as one food item for OVS.

- Breakfast menus may offer 1 oz eq of grains, 1 oz eq of MMA, or 1 oz eq of both.

- 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*.

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- 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*.

- At least 80 percent of the grain menu items offered in the weekly breakfast 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*.

- A serving of MMA is the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish, e.g., cooked lean meat without bone, breading, binders, extenders, or other ingredients. Commercial processed MMA products (such as combination entrees, deli meats, hot dogs, sausages, dried meats, and alternate protein products) require a Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS) to document crediting information. 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*, and visit the "Meats/Meat Alternates Component" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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

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OVS Menu Planning Requirements for Breakfast

SFAs must meet the menu planning criteria below for breakfasts to be reimbursable under OVS. SFAs should plan breakfast 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

Breakfast menus must include at least four food items from the three meal components (milk, fruits, and grains/MMA). The planned serving for each food item must be at least the minimum daily serving for each grade group (refer to "Overview of Breakfast Meal Components" in this document).

- The four food items may include:
    - two servings of grains/MMA (either two of the same grains/MMA or two different grains/MMA);
    - one serving of grains and one serving of MMA; or
    - two servings of fruits or vegetable substitutions (either two of the same fruit/vegetable, two different fruits/vegetables, or one fruit and one vegetable).
- The four food items cannot include two servings of milk.
- One food item equals 1 cup of milk, ½ cup of fruits (including vegetable substitutions), and 1 oz eq of grains/MMA.

For information on the SBP meal patterns, visit the "Breakfast 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.

Student selections of duplicate servings

Duplicate servings are two servings of the same food, such as two apples or two bagels. When the fruits component (including vegetable substitutions) or grains/MMA component includes two or more choices, SFAs may allow students to select duplicate servings. The examples below show how this provision applies.

- The breakfast menu offers a variety of different 1-oz eq choices from the grains/MMA component and allows students to choose any two food items. Students may select two servings of the same grain item (such as two servings of cereal) or two servings of the same MMA item (such as two cheese sticks) because the menu is planned to allow any two servings.

- The breakfast menu offers a variety of ½-cup choices from the fruits component and allows students to choose any two food items. Students may select two servings of the same fruit, such as two servings of fruit salad because the menu is planned to allow any two servings. **Note:** Students cannot be allowed to select two serving of juice because this exceeds the weekly juice limit (refer to "Fruits component" in this document).

SFAs must clearly communicate this information on the breakfast menu and cafeteria signage and must train food service staff to recognize reimbursable meals with duplicate servings.

Offering larger servings

SFAs may serve larger amounts of any meal component if the weekly breakfast 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 or more food items.

SFAs must establish one price for a complete reimbursable breakfast in the paid meal category and one price for a complete reimbursable breakfast in the reduced-price meal category. SFAs may set different unit prices (tiered pricing) for various combinations of foods offered as a reimbursable breakfast. An example is one price for a meal with a larger breakfast entree and another price for a meal with different combinations of foods. However, all students, including

those eligible for free and reduced-price meals, must be allowed to select any reimbursable breakfast. Breakfasts with a higher unit price must be available at no cost for all free-eligible students and at no more than 30 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 breakfasts:** The first type of signage must identify all planned reimbursable breakfasts (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 breakfast 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 choices in ½-cup servings, the breakfast menu and cafeteria signage must indicate that students may select up to two servings (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.

Required student selections

Students must select at least three food items, which must include at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitutions, if offered) and the full serving of at least two other food items. Selections of less than ½ cup of fruits or vegetables do not count as a food item for OVS, unless the student also selects additional fruits or vegetables to total at least ½ cup.

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

Declining foods

After selecting the three required food items (including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables), students may decline any other food items or may take smaller portions of the declined food items. However, selections of less than the full serving do not count as a food item for OVS. For example, if the breakfast menu provides 1 oz eq of the grains/MMA component from two ½-oz eq WGR mini blueberry muffins, students must take both muffins to count as 1 food item for OVS. One muffin (½ oz eq) does not count as a food item for OVS because it is less than the full serving.

Counting Food Items at Breakfast

The USDA allows flexibility for counting fruits and grains/MMA as food items in breakfast menus, depending on the SFA's menu planning needs and what works best for their SBP. These flexibilities do not apply to OVS at lunch.

- **Fruits component (including optional vegetable substitutions):** A ½-cup serving of fruit (or vegetable substitution) counts as one food item. SFAs may choose to count 1 cup of fruits or vegetables as either one or two food items.

- **Grains/MMA component:** A 1-oz eq serving of grains/MMA counts as one food item. SFAs may count foods that provide more than 1 oz eq as more than one food item if the additional amount provides at least the full 1 oz eq. For example, the menu planner may count a whole-grain muffin or bagel that contains 2 oz eq of grains as one or two food items. Amounts less than 1 oz eq do not count for OVS. For example, a 1½ oz eq whole-grain muffin or 1¾ oz eq bagel counts as one food item for OVS.

Deciding how to count 1 cup of fruits or vegetables

Offering all fruit and vegetable choices in ½-cup servings is a best practice to help encourage students' selections of reimbursable meals. However, in some situations it may be advantageous to count 1 cup of fruit as one food item.

An example is a breakfast menu that offers a variety of fresh fruit choices, including 125-138 count apples, 150-count bananas, and 138-count oranges. The USDA's *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (FBG) indicates that a 125-138 count apple credits as 1 cup of fruit, which means the menu planner could choose to count this apple as two food items for OVS. However, the FBG indicates that the banana and orange each credit as ½ cup of fruit.

It could be confusing for students and food service staff to count one apple as two food items but count one banana or one orange as only one food item. In this situation, it might be simpler to count all fresh fruit choices as one food item. This consistency makes it easy for students to

understand what they can select for a reimbursable meal and helps staff to identify reimbursable meals.

Deciding how to count grains/MMA with multiple oz eq

The advantage of counting grains/MMA with multiple oz eq as more than one food item is helping to increase reimbursable meals. Students who select a grain/MMA that counts as more than one food item only need one more food item (½ cup of fruits or vegetables) for a reimbursable breakfast.

The advantage of counting grains/MMA with multiple oz eq as one food item is encouraging students to select additional foods for a more nutritious breakfast. Students who select a grain/MMA that counts as one food item must also select at least two more food items for a reimbursable breakfast, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables.

There are several factors for menu planners to consider when determining which option might work best for their SBP. Some considerations include the types of food items offered, the number of other food items offered in the meal, what meals students typically select (based on production record data), the cost of menu items, and how the offered food items affect students' ability to select reimbursable meals and staff's ability to recognize reimbursable meals.

Counting food items in smoothies

The ingredients in smoothies that may credit toward the breakfast meal pattern requirements include milk, yogurt and soy yogurt, pureed fruits and vegetables, and fruit and vegetable juices. Pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies credit as juice. For example, ½ cup of pureed blueberries credits as ½ cup of fruit juice, which counts as one food item for OVS.

Yogurt and soy yogurt used in smoothies must meet the limit for added sugars. They cannot exceed 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (no more than 2 grams of added sugars per ounce).

Smoothies credit toward the OVS food items based on the quantity of each meal component they contain. For example, a smoothie that contains 1 cup of yogurt and ½ cup of pureed strawberries counts as three food items for OVS.

- One cup of yogurt credits as 2 oz eq of MMA, which counts as two food items.
- One-half cup of pureed fruit credits as ½ cup of juice, which counts as one food item.

To meet the breakfast meal pattern requirements for a reimbursable meal, this breakfast menu must also offer 1 cup of a variety of milk choices (refer to "Milk component" in this document) and another ½ cup serving of fruit or vegetable substitution to meet the 1-cup requirement.

For this example, a student who selects only the smoothie meets the OVS requirements for a reimbursable meal. The smoothie contains ½ cup of fruit juice and the full serving of two other food items (two MMA), which meets the minimum requirements for a reimbursable meal (refer to "Required student selections" in this document).

For more information on crediting smoothies, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Smoothies in the School Nutrition Programs*. For guidance on offering smoothies with OVS, refer to the USDA's resource, *Offering Smoothies as Part of Reimbursable School Meals: Grades Kindergarten Through 12 (K-12)*.



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Examples of OVS at Breakfast

The examples below show how OVS is implemented at breakfast. SFAs must offer four food items from the three meal components in at least the full serving for each grade group. Students must select at least three food items, which must include at least ½ cup of fruit (or vegetable substitutions, if offered) and the full serving of at least two other food items.

Example 1: Breakfast menu with four food items

Planned breakfast menu	Meal components	Food items
Whole-wheat bagel, 2 ounces	Grains/MMA: 2 oz eq	2 grains
Strawberries, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
Orange slices, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
Choice of milk, 1 cup	Milk: 1 cup	1 milk

Student selects	Reimbursable meal: At least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruits/vegetables
Strawberries Milk	No. The meal includes only two food items (one fruit and one milk).
Bagel Strawberries	Yes. The meal includes three food items (two grains and one fruit).
Bagel Milk	No. The meal includes three food items (two grains and one milk) but is missing at least ½ cup of fruits/vegetables.
Strawberries Orange Milk	Yes. The meal includes three food items (two fruits and one milk).
Bagel Orange Milk	Yes. The meal includes four food items (two grains, one fruit, and one milk).

Example 2: Breakfast menu with five food items

Planned breakfast menu	Meal components	Food items
Whole-wheat bagel, 1-ounce slice	Grains/MMA: 1 oz eq	1 grain
Low-fat string cheese, 1 ounce	Grains/MMA: 1 oz eq	1 MMA
Apple slices, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
Blueberries, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
Choice of milk, 1 cup	Milk: 1 cup	1 milk

Student selects	Reimbursable meal: At least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruits/vegetables
Bagel String cheese Blueberries	Yes. The meal includes three food items (one grain, one MMA, and one fruit).
Bagel String cheese Milk	No. The meal includes three food items (one grain, one MMA, and one milk) but is missing at least ½ cup of fruits/vegetables.
String cheese Apple slices Milk	Yes. The meal includes three food items (one MMA, one fruit, and one milk).
Bagel Blueberries Milk	Yes. The meal includes three food items (one grain, one fruit, and one milk).
Bagel Apple slices Milk	Yes. The meal includes three food items (one grain, one fruit, and one milk).

Example 3: Breakfast menu with choices from four food items

This menu allows two choices from the grains/MMA component. Students may select two of the same food item or two different food items. This menu counts each ½-cup serving of fruit as one food item and allows two choices. Students may select two of the same fruit, two different fruits, or one fruit and one juice.

Planned breakfast menu	Meal components	Food items
Choose up to two (2 oz eq total)		
• Whole-grain cereal flakes, 1 cup	Grains: 1 oz eq	1 grain
• Whole-grain muffin, 2 ounces	Grains: 1 oz eq	1 grain
• Oatmeal, ½ cup	Grains: 1 oz eq	1 grain
• Whole-wheat bagel, 1 ounce	Grains: 1 oz eq	1 grain
• Low-fat yogurt, ½ cup	MMA: 1 oz eq	1 MMA
• String cheese stick, 1 ounce	MMA: 1 oz eq	1 MMA
• Peanut butter, 2 tablespoons	MMA: 1 oz eq	1 MMA
Choose two fruits or one fruit and one juice (1 cup total)		
• Applesauce, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
• Banana, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
• Peaches, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
• Orange, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
• Blueberries, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
• 100 percent juice, ½ cup	Fruits: ½ cup	1 fruit
Choice of milk, 1 cup	Milk: 1 cup	1 milk

Student selects	Reimbursable meal: At least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruits/vegetables
Yogurt, two servings Blueberries	Yes. The meal includes three food items (two MMA and one fruit).
Cheese sticks, two servings Banana	Yes. The meal includes three food items (two MMA, and one fruit).
Cereal, two servings Milk	No. The meal includes three food items (two grains and one milk).

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Student selects	Reimbursable meal: At least three food items including at least ½ cup of fruits/vegetables
Yogurt, two servings Blueberries	Yes. The meal includes three food items (two MMA, and one fruit).
Yogurt Cheese stick Applesauce	Yes. The meal includes three food items (two MMA, and one fruit).
Oatmeal Applesauce Milk	Yes. The meal includes three food items (one grain, one fruit, and one milk).
Muffin Orange Milk	Yes. The meal includes three food items (one grain, one fruit, and one milk).
Cereal Yogurt Blueberries	Yes. The meal includes three food items (one grain, one MMA, and one fruit).
Bagel Peanut butter Juice	Yes. The meal includes three food items (one grain, one MMA, and one fruit).

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 food items for OVS at breakfast. These decisions are important because they determine the foods and amounts that students must take for a reimbursable meal. 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 food items.

SFAs should be consistent with menu planning and crediting food items to help minimize confusion among students and school food service staff. For example, decide whether to count a 2 oz eq WGR bagel as one or two food items, then credit it the same way for all breakfast 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 grains/MMA and fruits 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 grains/MMA

- **Offer the full serving of all grain/MMA choices:** Offer all grains/MMA in at least 1 oz eq so any choice counts as at least one food item for OVS. For example, offer a 1-oz eq muffin (one food item) instead of two ½-oz eq muffins (one food item).

- **Offer the same oz eq for all choices of food items:** Offer the same oz eq for all choices so each choice counts as the same number of food items for OVS. For example, offer 2 oz eq of all muffins, bagels, and RTE breakfast cereals or offer 1 oz eq of all yogurts, cheese sticks, and peanut butter. This makes it easier for students to understand what they can take and makes it simpler for staff to identify reimbursable meals. When choices include different serving sizes within the same meal component, such as a 1 oz eq grain and a 2 oz eq grain, it can be confusing for students and staff to understand what is required for a reimbursable meal.

- **Offer breakfast choices that provide at least two food items**: Some examples include a 2 oz eq WGR muffin (two food items), a 3-oz eq whole-grain bagel (three food items), and a breakfast sandwich made with 1 oz eq English muffin and 2 oz eq egg

(three food items). Students who select a menu choice with at least two food items only need ½ cup of fruits (or optional vegetable substitutions) for a reimbursable breakfast.

Strategies for fruits (including vegetable substitutions)

- **Offer all fruit choices in ½-cup servings:** Offer a variety of fruits in ½-cup servings and allow students to select up to two servings (1 cup total). This makes it easier for students to meet the OVS requirement for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. Provide clear information on breakfast menus and cafeteria signage that instructs students on the amount they can select with each breakfast.

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

Communication

SFAs must clearly communicate the daily menu options to food service staff and students. Breakfast menus and cafeteria signage must indicate what foods students may select 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 point of 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:

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

Training on the OVS requirements for breakfast is available in 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*. The knowledge check for Module 18, *Meal or No Meal Breakfast Edition,* allows school food service to test their ability to identify reimbursable breakfasts 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.

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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

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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.fns.usda.gov/cn/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16

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 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

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

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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

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