Signage Requirements for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

This document provides guidance on the signage requirements for schools and institutions that participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). These requirements also apply to the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP.

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The NSLP and SBP regulations require that school food authorities (SFA) must post cafeteria signage that provides clear information about the daily planned reimbursable meals and all allowable choices. The purpose of this signage is to prevent unintentional purchases of a la carte items and help students choose a reimbursable meal.

Two Signage Requirements

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

1: Identify foods and amounts offered for all planned reimbursable meals

Section 7 CFR 210.10(a)(2) of the NSLP regulations and section 7 CFR 220.8(a)(2) of the SBP regulations require that SFAs must post signage to identify the planned reimbursable meals (i.e., all offered full meals), including the meal components and portions and any choices or combination of choices available within each meal component. This signage must be located near or at the beginning of each serving line.

> This requirement applies to all schools and institutions, including those that do not implement OVS and those that implement family-style meal service.

2: Identify required student selections for reimbursable meals with OVS

Schools that implement OVS must indicate the minimum amount of each meal component (lunch) or food item (breakfast) that students must select for a reimbursable meal, 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 meal components or food items are available.

- **Example:** A high school lunch menu offers fruits and vegetables in ½-cup servings and allows students to select two servings of fruits and two servings of vegetables to meet the required 1-cup serving for grades 9-12. The cafeteria signage must clearly communicate that students may select up to two servings of fruit and two servings of vegetables with each meal. This signage must be located on the serving line where the fruit and vegetable options are available.

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SFAs are not required to provide detailed information about the meal components, such as identifying the vegetable subgroups. However, the CSDE strongly encourages SFAs to provide detailed information whenever possible, within the constraints of the menu and serving line. This helps promote the school nutrition programs and makes it easier for students to understand what reimbursable meals include.

For more information on signage with OVS, refer to the CSDE's *Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals* and visit the "Required Signage for OVS" section of the CSDE's OVS webpage.

Types of Acceptable Signage

SFAs may choose how to identify the foods that are part of reimbursable meals, based on their facilities, layout, and other considerations. Some examples of acceptable signage include menu boards, posters, signs, labels, and table tents.

Reviewing Signage for Compliance

The checklist below helps SFAs determine if cafeteria signage meets the USDA requirements. Answer these questions for each cafeteria serving line. If any answers are "no," the SFA must update the cafeteria signage as applicable.

- Is signage available for each daily lunch and breakfast choice and each serving line?
- Is signage clearly visible?
- Is signage located at or near the beginning of each serving line?
- OVS only: Is signage located at the applicable points in the serving line near each meal component (lunch) or food item (breakfast)?

A helpful best practice strategy to determine if the cafeteria signage is clear and effective is to conduct a cafeteria walk-through. Review the signage at the beginning of the serving line and continue through the entire serving line to the point of service.

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Resources

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

Offer versus Serve Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers: National School Lunch Program (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/offer-vs-serve-lunch-program-tip-sheet

Offer versus Serve Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers: School Breakfast Program (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/offer-vs-serve-breakfast-program-tip-sheet

Required Signage for OVS (CSDE's Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/offer-versus-serve-for-school-nutrition-programs/required-signage-for-ovs

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 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)

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 17: Offer versus Serve (OVS) in the National School Lunch 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#module17

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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/signage_requirements_nslp_sbp.pdf.

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
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   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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