Guide to Meal Service Requirements for Preschoolers in the School Nutrition Programs

National School Lunch Program • School Breakfast Program

Afterschool Snack Program • Seamless Summer Option

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



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About this Guide

The Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *Guide to Meal Service Requirements for Preschoolers in the School Nutrition Programs* provides detailed guidance and resources to assist school food authorities (SFAs) with meeting the meal service requirements for preschoolers in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP.

The requirements in this guide apply to all public schools, private schools, and residential child care institutions (RCCIs) that provide NSLP and SBP preschool meals and ASP preschool snacks.

> This guide reflects the USDA regulations and policies in effect as of the publication date. Please note that this information may change. The CSDE will update this guide whenever the USDA issues new guidance for the preschool meal patterns. Please check the "Menu Planning Guidance Series" section of CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage for the most current version. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/preschool/guide_meal_service_preschool_snp.pdf.

Questions regarding this guide may be directed to Susan Fiore, MS, RD, Nutrition Education Coordinator, at 860-807-2075 or susan.fiore@ct.gov.

CSDE's Menu Planning Guidance Series

This guide is part of the CSDE's menu planning guidance series for the preschool meal patterns of the school nutrition programs.

- Guide to the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs
- Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs (applies to the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool)
- Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs (applies to the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool)
- Guide to Meal Service Requirements for Preschoolers in the School Nutrition Programs

These guides are available on the CSDE's Menu Planning Guidance Series section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Contact Information

For questions regarding the NSLP, SBP, and ASP, please contact the school nutrition programs staff in the CSDE's Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs. The CSDE's resource, *County Assignments for School Nutrition Programs,* indicates each Connecticut county's assigned CSDE school nutrition team member who provides technical assistance for the USDA school nutrition programs.

For a list of all CSDE Child Nutrition Programs staff, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Child Nutrition Staff and Responsibilities*.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

APP	alternate protein product
AR	Administrative Review
ASP	Afterschool Snack Program of the NSLP
CACFP	Child and Adult Care Food Program
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
C.G.S.	Connecticut General Statutes
CN	Child Nutrition
CSDE	Connecticut State Department of Education
FBG	Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA)
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
FDP	Food Distribution Program
FNA	Food and Nutrition Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture
FR	Federal Register
ICN	Institute of Child Nutrition
LEA	local educational agency
MMA	meats/meat alternates
NSFSA	nonprofit school food service account
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
OVS	offer versus serve
oz eq	ounce equivalents
PFS	product formulation statement

RCCI	residential child care institution
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SOP	standard operating procedure
SSO	Seamless Summer Option of the NSLP
SFA	school food authority
TCS	Time/Temperature Control for Safety Food
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
WGR	whole grain-rich
WIC	Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children

For additional guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Common Acronyms and Abbreviations in the School Nutrition Programs*.

1 — Introduction

Meals served to preschoolers must comply with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) preschool meal patterns. Afterschool snacks served to preschoolers must comply with the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) meal patterns. The Seamless Summer Option (SSO) follows the NSLP and SBP meal patterns.

School food authorities (SFAs) are eligible for USDA reimbursement when preschool meals and afterschool snacks contain the minimum serving of each required meal component for each age group and meet all crediting requirements. In addition to meeting the preschool meal patterns and crediting requirements, SFAs must also comply with all applicable USDA regulations and policies for meal service to preschoolers.

Overview of Preschool Meal Patterns

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) preschool meal patterns for ages 1-5 are designed to meet children's calorie needs, provide key nutrients, and align with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. These meal patterns help young children eat the types and amounts of foods that best support their growth and development.

The preschool meal patterns require minimum servings of specific meal components for breakfast, lunch, and afterschool snack for two different age groups: ages 1-2 and ages 3-5.

Meal components and crediting requirements

A meal component is one of the five food groups that comprise reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. These meal components include milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats/meat alternates (MMA).

Each meal component has specific crediting requirements. All foods and beverages must meet these requirements to credit as a meal component of reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. This includes commercial products, foods made from scratch by the SFA, and foods prepared by vendors.

For detailed guidance on the meal pattern requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

For information on the crediting requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Required documentation

SFAs must maintain appropriate documentation to indicate that preschool meals and afterschool snacks meet the applicable meal pattern and crediting requirements for each meal and age group. Without appropriate documentation, foods and beverages do not credit toward the preschool meal patterns. The CSDE will disallow reimbursement for noncompliant meals and afterschool snacks.

For detailed guidance on the documentation requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Program webpage.

Changes to preschool meal patterns

On April 25, 2024, the USDA published the final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (89 FR 31962). This final rule implements gradual updates to the Child Nutrition Programs in several key areas, including the preschool meal patterns.

For more information on the final rule changes, refer to the CSDE's *Summary of Final Rule Updates to the Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the "Meal Pattern Changes" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage.







Overview of Meal Service Requirements

Federal and state regulations and policies address certain meal service requirements for the school nutrition programs. This section addresses the requirements and guidance for the number of offered meals, meal schedules, types of meal service, point-of service meal and afterschool snack counts, children's intent to participate in the meal service, co-mingled meals, field trip meals, classroom meals, prohibition of gender separation, water availability during the meal and afterschool snack service, and family-provided foods for medical or special dietary needs.

Number of Offered Meals

Preschool programs that participate in the school nutrition programs must offer reimbursable meals to all children on each day the preschool program is in session. For example, if a preschool program operates five days per week and participates in the NSLP, the SFA must offer reimbursable lunches to all preschoolers on all five days.

Preschool programs that operate only a few days per week must offer reimbursable meals only on the days that children attend. For example, a preschool program that operates three days per week and participates in the NSLP must offer reimbursable meals to all preschoolers on all three days.

Point-of-service Meal/Snack Counts

All meal counts of reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks must be recorded at the point of service. This is the moment in the meal or snack service where staff can accurately determine that a reimbursable free, reduced-price, or paid meal or afterschool snack has been served to a child, i.e., the child has received the minimum portions of all required meal components.

- For cafeteria-style meal service, staff must record point-of-service meal counts after all the components of a reimbursable meal have been offered to the child. This is typically at the end of the serving line (refer to "Point-of-service meal counts for cafeteria-style meal service" in section 3).

- For pre-plated meal service (included bagged meals/snacks), staff must record point-of-service meal/snack counts when the child receives the meal or afterschool snack (refer to "Point-of-service counts for pre-plated meal service" in section 3).

- For family-style meal service and combination-style meal service, staff must record point-of-service meal/snack counts while children are eating, but no later than the conclusion of the meal or afterschool snack service (refer to "Monitoring point-of-service

meal/snack counts" and "Point-of-service counts for combination-style meal service" in section 3).

Meal/snack counts cannot be taken before or after the meal/snack service. The USDA does not allow any other methods to determine meal/snack counts, such as children's attendance, orders for meals/snacks, and the number of meals/snacks sent to or returned from satellite locations. Meal/snack counts must be recorded by trained staff who are familiar with the meal pattern requirements and can recognize reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. For more information, visit the CSDE's Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Children's Intent to Participate in the Meal Service

For SFAs to claim reimbursement for preschool meals and afterschool snacks, children must participate in the meal or afterschool snack service or have the intent to participate in the meal or afterschool snack service. A child who makes no attempt (i.e., has no intent) to join other children at the meal or afterschool snack cannot be included in the reimbursable meal or snack count, even if they were asked by the supervising adult to participate.



The USDA regulations allow for reimbursement of meals and afterschool snacks that are served to and eaten by children. They do not allow for reimbursement of ordered or plated meals or afterschool snacks. It may be difficult to judge the child's intent to participate in the meal or afterschool snack service when SFAs use pre-plated meals/ snacks or supervising adults serve the children.

If a child refuses a meal or afterschool snack that is pre-plated or served by a staff member, the SFA cannot claim the meal or afterschool snack for reimbursement. The child must show intent to eat, such as coming willingly to the table, helping themself to food or asking to be served, and attempting to eat the meal or snack. The child does not have to eat the meal or afterschool snack for the SFA to claim reimbursement, but the child must demonstrate the intent to eat.

When a child who clearly has no intent to participate in the meal or afterschool snack service is forced to come to the table or put food on their plate, the SFA cannot claim the meal or afterschool snack for reimbursement. This policy is in place to ensure that mealtimes provide positive experiences around food and help children develop a healthy, balanced approach to eating.

There are various reasons that children might not have the intent to participate in the meal or afterschool snack service. A child could have behavioral issues or be feeling unwell, which can diminish their appetite or interest in food. Emotions such as tiredness, anger, or frustration can also play a significant role in a child's willingness to participate in a meal or snack.

Examples of intent to participate in the meal service

The examples below illustrate the principle of a child's intent to eat, and when SFAs can claim reimbursement for preschool meals and snacks.

- **Example 1:** A child typically chooses not to participate in the meal or afterschool snack service. A teacher forces the child to come and sit at the table and serves the child some food. The child does not eat. Can the SFA claim the meal?

  No. The child has not chosen (i.e., has no intent) to participate in the meal or snack. Since the teacher knows this child typically does not eat, it would be clear that the child did not intend to participate in the meal or snack.

  If the child willingly comes to the table, chooses to take a serving of food, but then does not eat, the meal or snack is reimbursable. In this case, the child has the intent to eat, even if they did not follow through.

- **Example 2:** A child who normally participates in the meal service comes to the table then chooses not to take any food. Can the SFA claim the meal?

  No. The child has chosen not to participate.

- **Example 3:** At snack time, a child is crying and upset over an altercation with another child. The teacher asks her to come to the table, but she refuses. Can the SFA claim the meal?

  No. The child has chosen not to participate.

- **Example 4:** A child willingly comes to the table at mealtime. He helps himself to several meal components, takes one bite, and then stops eating because he does not feel well. Can the SFA claim the meal?

  Yes. The child chose to participate and had the intent to eat, even though he changed his mind when he did not feel well.

- **Example 5:** A child gets sick just before lunch. She is lying on a cot, waiting for her parent to pick her up. Can the SFA claim the meal?

  No. The child does not have the intent to participate in the meal.



2 — Meal Schedules

Local educational agencies (LEAs) should schedule meal services to ensure good nutrition practices, minimize food waste, and provide sufficient time for children to eat.

Timing and Length of Lunch Periods

The timing and length of lunch periods in Connecticut schools are governed by federal and state laws. The NSLP regulations require that lunch must occur within specific timeframes [7 CFR 210.10(l)(1)] and encourage schools to provide sufficient lunch periods to give all students adequate time to be served and to eat their lunches [7 CFR 210.10(l)(2)]. The Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) require a minimum 20-minute daily lunch period for all full-day students in public schools (Section 10-221o). These requirements are summarized below.

USDA requirement for timing of lunch periods

Section 7 CFR 210.10(l)(1)) of the USDA's NSLP regulations specify that schools and institutions participating in the NSLP must serve lunches during the period from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. If lunches will be served before or after this time during regular school days or half days, LEAs must submit a written waiver request to the CSDE for the alternate lunch time. The CSDE must evaluate the circumstances of each request to determine whether it meets one of the two USDA criteria for an exemption from the specified timeframe for lunch

1. The CSDE may grant reasonable variances from the meal service time requirements to accommodate special circumstances encountered in schools operating for traditional students at traditional times. For example, if a school has a condensed schedule on a planned half day, the school may need to serve lunch prior to 10 a.m. due to capacity and may therefore request an exception from the CSDE to serve outside of the 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. timeframe.

2. The CSDE may grant reasonable variances from the meal service time requirements if the school operates for traditional students but at a nontraditional time. For example, a school may need to provide lunch service from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. to accommodate a work-study program that allows high school students to work in the morning and attend high school classes in the later afternoon or evening. For this specific circumstance, the CSDE will grant a meal service time variance only if: a) these alternative programs provide high school grade students an opportunity to obtain the minimum requirements for graduation at a nontraditional time; and b) it is not possible to serve lunch during the 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. timeframe.

The written request for a variance in lunch service times must be submitted to the CSDE by one of the designated authorized signers for the LEA and must include a description of the special circumstances at the school that make it necessary for the school to serve lunch outside of the required NSLP service times. The exemption request must emailed to the SFA's assigned CSDE school nutrition team member by July 1 for the upcoming school year. For more information, refer to the CSDE's Operational Memorandum No. 03-22: *Updated Requirements for Lunch Periods in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)*.

State requirement for length of lunch periods

C.G.S. Section 10-221o requires that all public schools must provide a minimum 20-minute daily lunch period for full-day students. This 20-minute lunch period is not required on half days or early dismissal days since school is not operating a full day.

C.G.S. Section 10-221o applies only to full-day students. This state statute does not apply to half-day students, such as preschoolers in a half-day program.

> A 20-minute lunch period might not be sufficient for younger children. Individual eating paces can vary greatly for young children, and some children may require more time to finish their meals (refer to "Allow Sufficient Time to Eat" in this section). Section 7 CFR 210.10(l)(2) of the NSLP regulations encourages schools to provide sufficient lunch periods that are long enough to give all students adequate time to be served and to eat their lunches.

For more information, refer to the CSDE's Circular Letter C-9: *Federal and State Requirements for Provision and Timeframe of Daily Lunch Period for Students* and Operational Memorandum No. 03-22: *Updated Requirements for Lunch Periods in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)*.

Timing and Length of Breakfast Periods

The SBP regulations do not require a specific timeframe or length for breakfast. However, Section 7 CFR 220.2 of the SBP regulations requires that breakfast must be served at or close to the beginning of the child's day at school. The CSDE recommends that scheduled breakfast periods should allow preschoolers at least 20 minutes to eat breakfast, after all children are seated at the table (refer to "Allow Sufficient Time to Eat" in this section).

Guidelines for Scheduling Meals and Snacks

LEAs should consider the appropriate timing and scheduling for meals and afterschool snacks to effectively meet young children's nutritional needs and promote a healthy eating environment. SFAs should collaborate with school administrators to establish optimal meal and snack schedules. The CSDE recommends following the guidelines below when planning meals and afterschool snacks for preschoolers.

Provide consistent mealtimes

Consistent meal and snack times are essential for creating a predictable routine that meets children's nutritional needs and supports their overall development. A regular schedule fosters a sense of security and encourages good eating habits. It also promotes social interactions, allowing children to engage with peers and practice communication skills. Additionally, maintaining regular mealtimes helps regulate children's energy levels and moods, reducing irritability and fatigue, which leads to more focused activities.

Space eating intervals appropriately

LEAs should schedule meal and afterschool snack periods at appropriate times that are not too close together or too far apart. When the time span is too short, children may not be hungry enough to eat. When the time span is too long, children may experience hunger symptoms (such as fatigue, irritability, inability to concentrate, weakness, and stomach pains) that can significantly disrupt their daily activities and learning.

Younger children have small stomachs and high energy needs and need to eat frequently. The general recommendation for preschoolers is to offer meals and snacks at least two hours apart but not more than three hours apart. This frequency helps children maintain consistent energy levels while minimizing excessive hunger or overeating.

Adjust meal schedules as needed

LEAs may need to adjust their meal and afterschool snack schedules based on children's needs, such as activity levels and developmental stages. Staff should pay attention to children's behavior and hunger signs (such as increased restlessness, difficulty concentrating, or asking for food) to make informed decisions about adjusting times for meals and afterschool snacks. By adopting a flexible approach to scheduling, LEAs can provide a supportive environment that helps children develop healthy eating habits.

Schedule mealtimes after structured physical activity or active play

Scheduling mealtimes after structured physical activity or active play is an effective strategy to increase meal consumption, promote better behavior, and encourage a more positive mealtime environment. Children who play before they eat have improved behavior at mealtimes and in the classroom. They are less likely to be distracted or fidgety, leading to more pleasant dining experiences and improved social interactions with peers.

Engaging in physical activity stimulates children's appetites, making them more likely to enjoy their meal, try new foods, and finish their portions. They waste less food and drink more milk, which leads to increased nutrient intake.

In addition to promoting better eating habits, scheduling meals after active play can positively influence children's behavior and create a calmer, more focused environment at the table. This improves the mealtime atmosphere and helps children be more settled and ready to learn upon returning to classroom activities.

Allow Sufficient Time to Eat

The USDA regulations do not require a specific amount of time for children to eat meals and afterschool snacks. However, allowing sufficient time for all children to eat and socialize during mealtimes is essential for fostering healthy eating habits. Allowing sufficient time at the table encourages conversations, helps children learn to share and take turns, and promotes positive mealtime behaviors.

As indicated earlier, Connecticut law requires that public schools must provide a minimum 20-minute daily lunch period for full-day students (refer to "Lunch Periods" in this section). However, this timeframe may not be sufficient for younger children. Individual eating paces can vary greatly for young children, and some children may require more time to finish their meals.

The CSDE recommends that scheduled mealtimes allow for at least 20 minutes to eat breakfast or snack and at least 30 minutes to eat lunch, after all children are seated at the table. This allows children to consume their meals without feeling rushed and fosters social interactions that are vital for children's emotional and social development. LEAs should adjust these timeframes as needed to ensure that all children have enough time to eat until they are no longer hungry.

3 — Types of Meal Service

SFAs may use any type of meal service that is appropriate to the individual needs and logistics of each school. Allowable types of meal service include pre-plated, cafeteria style, family style, and combination style.

Pre-plated meal service

With pre-plated meal service (including bagged meals), staff pre-plate the minimum portion of each meal component, based on the preschool meal pattern requirements for each age group. For example, staff prepare each child's plate for lunch with the minimum serving of MMA, grains, vegetables, and fruits, and portion each child's cup with the minimum serving of milk. The requirements and guidance for pre-plated meal service are summarized below.

- The meal or afterschool snack must provide the minimum portion of all required meal components at the same time (refer to "Overview of Preschool Meal Patterns" in section 1).

- Staff prepare plates and cups before children are seated.

- Staff use appropriate serving utensils (e.g., scoops (dishers), spoodles, and serving spoons) to measure the required portions for each age group. For more information, visit the "Portion Control" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

- SFAs provide serving staff with appropriate training and guidance to ensure portions meet the minimum requirements of the preschool meal patterns. The CSDE's training modules, *Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs*, provide detailed guidance on meeting the requirements of the preschool meal patterns. Examples of training resources include the preschool meal patterns (refer to the CSDE's *Guide to the Preschool Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage), crediting guidance (refer to the CSDE's *Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage), and completed menu forms, production records, and recipes (refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage). For more resources, refer to section 8.

Additional guidance on the preschool meal patterns is available on the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Point-of-service counts for pre-plated meal service

Assigned staff must record point-of-service meal/snack counts when the child receives all required meal components (refer to "Point-of-service meal/snack counts" in section 1). This also applies to bagged meals/snacks handed out to children during the meal/snack service.

Cafeteria-style Meal Service

Cafeteria-style meal service is common in school settings. Children go through the cafeteria serving line and food service staff serve each child the required meal components of their meal. Children may also self-serve some foods, such as selecting a carton of milk or a piece of fresh fruit. Some young children may require assistance from a supervising adult to safely carry their tray to a cafeteria table.

When cafeteria-style meal service includes co-mingled meals (i.e., reimbursable meals are served to preschoolers and older grades in the same service area at the same time), the meal pattern requirements of the older grades apply to preschoolers. For guidance on co-mingled meals, refer to section 4.

Point-of-service meal counts for cafeteria-style meal service

Staff must take meal counts for cafeteria-style meal service at the point of service (refer to "Point-of-service meal/snack counts" in section 1). The point-of-service is typically at the end of the serving line, after all the components of a reimbursable meal have been offered to the child. For more information, visit the CSDE's Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Family-style Meal Service

Family-style meal service allows children to serve themselves from communal platters or bowls of food with assistance, if needed, from supervising adults who sit with the children. This approach allows children to identify and be introduced to new foods, new tastes, and new menus, while developing a positive attitude toward healthy foods, sharing in group eating situations, and developing good eating habits. Family-style meal service also helps young children develop motor skills and the dexterity and hand strength needed to serve foods.

With family-style meal service, the minimum serving size of each meal component must be offered to each child over the course of the meal. Unlike pre-plated meal service or cafeteria-style meal service, family-style meals allow some flexibility in the initial serving sizes because additional servings of each food are readily available at each table, and more can be served at any time.

The USDA recommends using family-style meal service for ages 3-5. When a complete family-style service is not feasible, it can be beneficial to offer certain meal components family style, especially for younger children or when introducing a new food item. For more information, refer to "Combination-style meal service" in this section.

SFAs that implement family-style meal service must follow the guidelines below to ensure compliance and eligibility for reimbursement. For information on helping staff and children understand family-style meal service, refer to the USDA's guide, *Family Style Meal Service with Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*, and "Resources for family-style meal service" in this section

Communal serving dishes and utensils

The meal components must be served in communal bowls or dishes that are placed on the table before children are seated. Use appropriately sized unbreakable bowls, dishes, and serving utensils (such as tongs or spoons) for children to serve themselves.

Serve milk in child-sized pitchers. If different age groups are served at a meal or afterschool snack, use a different color pitcher and cup for each age group. For example, use a red pitcher and red cups to serve unflavored whole milk to age 1 and a blue pitcher and blue cups to serve unflavored low-fat or fat-free milk to ages 2-5.

Offering the minimum portions

The communal serving dishes must contain the full serving (minimum meal pattern amount) of each meal component for all children at the table. The milk pitcher must contain the full serving of the appropriate type of milk for each age group.

The examples below illustrate these requirements for ages 3-5.

- **Example 1:** The preschool lunch menu provides the required ¼-cup serving of the fruits component from ¼ cup of apple slices. If four children sit at the table, the communal serving plate or bowl must contain at least 1 cup of apple slices.

- **Example 2:** The preschool breakfast and lunch meal patterns require ¾ cup of milk for ages 3-5. If four children sit at the table, the milk pitcher must contain at least 3 cups of milk or that amount must be readily available nearby. If the required amount of milk makes the pitcher too heavy for young children, the pitcher can initially contain less milk if the remaining required quantity is readily available nearby.

If supervising adults eat with the children, the prepared amounts of food and milk must include the additional amounts needed for the adult meals. The expense of extra creditable food produced for meals for supervising adults during family-style meal service is an allowable cost for the SFA's nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA).

For guidance on how to calculate the required amount of food for each age group, refer to the USDA's guide, *Family Style Meal Service with Children in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*.

Offering the required meal components

Family-style meal service allows children to make choices in selecting foods and the serving size. Supervising adults should initially offer all children the full serving of each meal component. Children may select an initial amount that is less than the full serving.

Supervising adults should encourage children to take additional portions and selections to meet the full serving, as appropriate. However, children are not required to self-serve or consume the full serving. However, children must select or at least ¼ cup of vegetables, fruits, or both for a reimbursable meal (refer to "Requirement to select at least ¼ cup of fruits or vegetables at breakfast and lunch" in this section).

> SFAs may still claim the meal for reimbursement if a child refuses a meal component or takes a smaller amount of any meal component except for the minimum ¼ cup of vegetables, fruits, or both.

Requirement to select fruits/vegetables at breakfast and lunch

To count as a reimbursable breakfast or lunch with family-style meal service, preschoolers must take (but are not required to consume) at least ¼ cup of vegetables, fruits, or both. If a preschooler chooses not to self-serve a vegetable or fruit, the meal is not reimbursable.

- **Example:** A school implements family-style meal service. For a reimbursable meal, each child must select at least ¼ cup of vegetables, fruits, or both. The USDA does not require children to select minimum amounts of any other meal components for a reimbursable meal. If the child selects only ¼ cup of vegetables, fruits, or both, the meal is reimbursable. However, supervising adults are responsible for actively encouraging each preschooler to accept the full serving of each meal component during the meal service.

The required quantity of vegetables/fruits that children must select for a reimbursable meal is different when preschoolers are co-mingled grades K-5 during family-style meal service. In this case, each child must select at least ½ cup of vegetables, fruits, or both for a reimbursable meal. The example below indicates how this requirement applies.

- **Example:** A school implements family-style meal service. Preschoolers and grades K-5 eat together during the meal service (co-mingled meals). The SFA used the meal pattern for grades K-5 for both groups. For a reimbursable meal, each child must select at least ½ cup of vegetables, fruits, or both.

For more information, refer to the USDA's resource, *Serving School Meals to Preschoolers*.

Selecting MMA, grains, and milk

Preschoolers may select an initial serving of MMA, grains, and milk that is less than the minimum quantity required in the preschool meal patterns. If a preschooler chooses not to self-serve or consume the full serving of these meal components, the meal is still reimbursable.

Second meals and servings

During family-style meal service, children may select additional servings beyond the minimum quantity required in the preschool meal patterns. However, SFAs cannot claim additional reimbursement for second meals or afterschool snacks and larger servings. SFAs can claim only one reimbursable breakfast, lunch, and afterschool snack for each preschooler per day.

Role of supervising adults

During the service of the meal or afterschool snack, supervising adults are responsible for actively encouraging each preschooler to accept the full serving of each meal component. For example, if a child initially refuses a meal component or does not accept the full serving, the supervising adult should offer the meal component to the child again.

As a reminder, preschoolers may select an initial amount that is less than the full serving, except for at least ¼ cup of vegetables/fruits at breakfast and lunch (refer to "Requirement to select fruits or vegetables" in this section). The requirement to select vegetables/fruits does not apply to afterschool snacks.

Role modeling

The CSDE strongly encourages supervising adults to eat with the children and assist with serving as needed. Role modeling at mealtimes is an important component of family-style meal service and assists in the development of healthy eating practices.

> Meals and afterschool snacks that follow the guidelines for family-style meal service are reimbursable, even if supervising adults do not eat with the children.

Monitoring point-of-service meal/snack counts

Supervising adults must be present and monitor the entire process at each table to ensure that children take a reimbursable meal or afterschool snack. Supervising adults must follow the proper procedures for counting reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks at the point of service. Point-of-service meal/snack counts must be recorded while children are eating, but no later than the conclusion of the meal or afterschool snack service (refer to "Point-of-service meal/snack counts" in section 1).

Point-of-service meal/snack counts must be recorded by trained supervising adults who are familiar with the preschool meal pattern requirements and can recognize reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks.

- To count as a reimbursable breakfast or lunch, the supervising adult must verify that each preschooler has selected at least ¼ cup of vegetables/fruits (refer to "Requirement to select fruits or vegetables" in this section). If meals are co-mingled with grades K-5, the supervising adult must verify that each preschooler has selected at least ½ cup of vegetables/fruits.

- To count as a reimbursable afterschool snack, the supervising adult must verify that each preschooler has selected the two required meal components.

The supervising adult must track children each day to determine which children in each meal eligibility category (free, reduced, and paid) ate the meal, without overt identification of the child's eligibility status.

Staff training

SFAs must ensure that supervising adults are trained in the requirements and proper procedures for implementing family-style meal service. For training slides and other materials, visit the USDA's Family Style Meal Service with Children in the CACFP Training Materials webpage.

> The family-style meal service requirements for the school nutrition programs are different from the CACFP because preschoolers are required to take at least ¼ cup of vegetable or fruit for a reimbursable breakfast or lunch. SFAs may use the CACFP training materials for general guidance on implementing family-style meal service. However, training for supervising adults must include the requirement to check that each preschooler selects at least ¼ cup of vegetable or fruit for a reimbursable breakfast or lunch.

Considerations for implementing family-style meal service

SFAs must ensure that family-style meal service is closely monitored to ensure that supervising adults serve reimbursable meals or afterschool snacks to preschoolers. The preschool program must be able to provide supervising adults who can monitor the entire process at each table to ensure that children take a reimbursable meal or afterschool snack. This includes offering the minimum portion of all required meal components and following the proper procedures for point-of-service meal/snack counts (refer to "Point-of-service meal/snack counts" in section 1).

Family-style meal service might not be appropriate for all preschool programs in the school setting. During the Administrative Review of the school nutrition programs, the CSDE has observed many compliance issues with family-style meal service in schools.

SFAs must carefully consider whether the preschool program has the capacity to implement family-style meal service correctly and ensure that reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks are served. Point-of-service meal/snack counts must be recorded by supervising adults who know how to identify when children have chosen a reimbursable meal or afterschool snack.

Accommodating special dietary needs during family-style meal service

SFAs must modify meals as appropriate for children whose disability restricts their diet. The USDA also encourages SFAs to make optional modifications for non-disability reasons, such as requests related to religious or moral convictions, general health concerns, and personal food preferences.

To accommodate modified meals during family-style meal service, SFAs may pre-plate food substitutions on the child's plate. The remaining meal components may be passed around "family style."

> If a child's dietary restriction requires avoidance of specific foods (such as food allergies or gluten intolerance), SFAs must consider the risk of cross-contact during meal service from serving utensils. It may be safer to pre-plate the child's full meal to ensure that cross-contact does not occur.

The requirements for meal modifications are summarized in the CSDE's resource, *Overview of the Requirements for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs*. For detailed guidance, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Requirement for written procedures

SFAs that choose to implement family-style meal service for preschoolers must develop written procedures for complying with the requirements for family-style meal service. These procedures must indicate how the school will implement family-style meal service and provide assurances that the school will meet all requirements below.

- SFAs will prepare, and supervising adults will offer, the minimum serving for each required meal component in the preschool meal patterns.
- Family-style meal service will be monitored by a trained supervising adult to ensure that children take a reimbursable meal. As a best practice, a supervising adult should sit with the children at each table.
- Meals and afterschool snacks will be counted at the point of service (refer to "Point-of-service meal/snack counts" in section 1). SFAs will claim reimbursable meals based on a child's free, reduced, or paid status. For breakfast or lunch, the supervising adult must verify that each preschooler takes at least ¼ cup of vegetables, fruits, or both.

- Supervising adults and other applicable staff will prevent overt identification of children's meal eligibly status during family-style meal service. The USDA defines overt identification as any action that may result in a child being recognized as certified for, or potentially eligible to receive, free or reduced-price meals, free or reduced-price snacks, or free milk.

- SFAs will conduct and document adequate training for all supervising adults, including guidance on meeting the preschool meal patterns and what constitutes a reimbursable meal with family-style meal service (refer to the "Meal Service" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage), proper meal counting procedures at the point of service (refer to the CSDE's Meal Counting and Claiming for School Nutrition Programs webpage), and the USDA's civil rights requirements (refer to the "Civil Rights Requirements for the School Nutrition Programs" section of the CSDE's Civil Rights for Child Nutrition Programs webpage).

SFAs must share these procedures with all staff and supervising adults involved in implementing family-style meal service. These procedures must be maintained on file for the CSDE's Administrative Review of the school nutrition programs.

Resources for family-style meal service

The resources below provide guidance on implementing family-style meal service.

- CACFP and Family Style Meal Service (Institute of Child Nutrition): https://theicn.org/wpfd_file/cacfp-and-family-style-meal-service/

- Family Style Meal Service ("Meal Service" section of CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-for-the-child-and-adult-care-food-program/meal-service#FamilyStyle

- Family Style Meal Service with Children in the CACFP Training Materials (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/family-style-meal-service-cacfp

- Meal Service (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/meal-service

- Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs, Module 8: Meal Service for Preschoolers (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/preschool-meal-pattern-training

- Serving School Meals to Preschoolers (USDA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/serving-school-meals-preschoolers

- USDA Memo SP 01-2018: Updated Infant and Preschool Meal Patterns in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program; Questions and Answers: https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/updated-infant-and-preschool-meal-patterns-national-school-lunch-program-and-school-breakfast

For additional resources, visit the "Meal Service" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage. For technical assistance, contact the SFA's assigned CSDE school nutrition team member.

SFAs may use the CACFP resources for general guidance on implementing family-style meal service but must ensure that supervising staff understand the requirement for preschoolers to select at least ¼ cup of vegetable or fruit for a reimbursable breakfast or lunch (refer to "Requirement to select fruits/vegetables at breakfast and lunch" in this section).



Combination-style Meal Service

Combination-style meal service combines pre-plated meal service and family-style meal service. Some foods in the meal are pre-plated while others are served family style. Combination-style meal service is a good option when a meal contains foods that cannot be easily or safely passed in common serving dishes from one child to another. Some examples include heavy or hot foods and liquids like soup, juice, and milk. The example below shows how SFAs could implement combination-style meal service for a preschool meal.

- **Example:** The preschool lunch menu includes a turkey sandwich, vegetable soup, garden salad, diced peaches, and milk. The vegetable soup and milk are pre-plated and the turkey sandwich, garden salad, and diced peaches are served family style. The supervising adult portions the minimum required amount of vegetable soup into each child's bowl and the minimum required amount of milk into each child's cup. The turkey sandwich, garden salad, and diced peaches are offered in common serving dishes that are passed around the table so children may serve themselves.

SFAs that use combination-style meal service must ensure that staff meet the specific requirements for both types of meal service (family style and pre-plated). For all pre-plated foods, the quantities placed on plates and in cups by the supervising adult must meet the minimum serving size for each age group. For all meal components, the quantities available in the common serving dishes provided by the food service staff must provide the minimum serving size for each child seated at the table and if applicable, all supervising adults that eat with the children.

Point-of-service counts for combination-style meal service

Meal counts for combination-style meal service must follow the same requirements for family-style meal service (refer to "Monitoring point-of-service meal/snack counts" in this section. Supervising adults must complete point-of-service meal counts while children are eating, but no later than the conclusion of the meal service (refer to "Point-of-service meal/snack counts" in section 1).

Classroom Meals

Classroom meals may be pre-plated or served family style or combination style. SFAs must ensure that all staff involved with classroom meals understand and implement the USDA's requirements for reimbursable meals in the classroom. This includes food service and non-food service, such as teachers, teacher aides, and other applicable classroom staff.

The CSDE strongly recommends that SFAs develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) for classroom meals to ensure that all staff understand the required procedures. For guidance on the requirements for classroom meals and how to avoid common meal pattern compliance issues, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Requirements for Classroom Meals in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*.

Point-of-service meal counts for classroom meals

Classroom staff must complete point-of-service meal counts while children are eating. SFAs must develop a local process to obtain accurate point-of-service meal counts for classroom meals. The example below shows an acceptable procedure for classroom meal counts.

- **Example:** The teacher has an attendance roster of the students in the classroom. During mealtime in the classroom, the teacher checks off the student's name after verifying that the student has received all the components for a reimbursable meal. The teacher returns the completed student roster to the cafeteria after the classroom meal service. The cafeteria manager reviews the information on the completed student roster by comparing the meal counts to the number of leftover meals. The cafeteria manager adds the number of classroom meals to the school's lunch counts for that day.

The SFA's SOP for classroom meals should include clear meal count instructions for classroom staff that indicate how to identify reimbursable meals (including reimbursable meals with OVS, if applicable), how to take point-of-service meal counts, how to handle leftover meals or foods (including milk), and a plan for informing substitutes of the requirements for classroom meals.

As a best practice, SFAs should include the meal count instructions with the daily delivery of the classroom meals. This helps everyone understand the required procedures and prevents staffing variations (such as teacher absences, substitutes, and parent volunteers) from resulting in noncompliant meals.

4 — Co-Mingled Meals and Afterschool Snacks

"Co-mingling" is the practice of serving reimbursable meals or afterschool snacks to a variety of grades in the same service area at the same time. This practice typically occurs due to operational constraints within a school, such as limited time and space.

Requirements for Co-mingled Meals/Snacks

SFAs may use the meal pattern of the older grades for both grade groups (preschoolers and the older grade group) when the co-mingled meal or afterschool snack service meets the requirements below.

1. The preschoolers and students from older grade groups are served meals or afterschool snacks together in the same place at the same time.

2. It is hard to tell the preschoolers from older students.

3. It would be operationally difficult to serve different foods or different amounts of foods during the combined meal or afterschool snack service.

If a school does not meet these requirements, SFAs must use the applicable meal pattern for each grade group, i.e., use the preschool meal pattern for preschoolers and use the applicable meal pattern for the older grades, such as K-5 or K-8.

Examples of Co-mingled Meals/Snacks

The examples below indicate when co-mingled meals or snacks are allowed.

- The SFA serves lunch or breakfast to preschoolers and grades K-5 in the same service area at the same time. The SFA may choose to follow the K-5 meal pattern for both groups.

- The SFA serves lunch or breakfast to preschoolers and grades K-8 in the same service area at the same time. The SFA may choose to follow the K-8 meal pattern for both groups.

- The SFA serves afterschool snack to preschoolers and grades K-12 in the same service area at the same time. The SFA may choose to follow the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12 for both groups.

When determining if a school may use the meal pattern of the older grades for co-mingled meals or afterschool snacks, SFAs must ensure that the meal or afterschool snack service meets the USDA's requirements (refer to "Requirements for Co-mingled Meals/Snacks" in this section).

Examples of determining if meal/snacks are co-mingled service

The examples below provide guidance on how to determine if the meal service is co-mingled and if the SFA may use the meal pattern of the older grades for preschoolers.

- **Example 1:** Preschoolers are mixed with students in grades K-5 and both grade groups go through the serving line together at lunch. Are these meals co-mingled?

  Yes. The school may use the K-5 lunch meal pattern for both grade groups. Since all children go through the serving line together at the same time, it would be difficult for food service staff to determine which children are in preschool or grades K-5.

- **Example 2:** Preschoolers and grades K-8 arrive at school at the same time and enter the cafeteria serving line together to get breakfast. Are these meals co-mingled?

  Yes. The school may use the K-8 breakfast meal pattern for both grade groups. All children go through the serving line together and eat in the same meal service area at the same time. Since students are not separated by grade, it would be difficult for staff to distinguish the preschool students from older students.

- **Example 3:** Preschoolers and grades K-8 are served afterschool snack in the same service area at the same time. Are these snacks co-mingled?

  Yes. The school may use the K-12 snack meal pattern for both grade groups. Since children are served afterschool snack together at the same time, it would be difficult for food service staff to determine which children are in preschool or grades K-8.

- **Example 4:** Preschoolers and grades K-5 eat together during the same meal period but one serving line is used for preschoolers and another serving line is used for grades K-5. Are these meals co-mingled?

  No. The school must use two different meal patterns. The preschool meal pattern must be used for preschoolers and the K-5 meal pattern must be used for grades K-5. While both grade groups eat together during the same meal period, the preschoolers can be easily identified because they go through a separate lunch line.

- **Example 5:** A school with preschoolers and grades K-8 offers a bagged grab-and-go breakfast from one location that is available to students at the beginning of the school day. Are these meals co-mingled?

  Yes. The school may use the K-8 breakfast meal pattern for both grade groups. Since the grab-and-go breakfast is available to all grade groups at the same time and location, it would be difficult for food service staff to determine which children are in preschool or grades K-8.

- **Example 6:** At lunch, the preschool classes eat immediately after the older grade groups. Food service staff do not have time to switch serving utensils or change food items, such as removing flavored milk. Are these meals co-mingled?

  Yes. The school may use the lunch meal pattern for the older grades for both grade groups. Since there is no time for food service staff to switch serving utensils or change the foods on the serving line, it would be operationally difficult for the school to serve different foods or different amounts of foods during the meal service.

- **Example 7:** Preschoolers eat breakfast in the classroom. Are these meals co-mingled?

  No. The school must use the preschool breakfast meal pattern. The preschoolers are not co-mingled with the older grades because they eat at a separate location and time.

Training on co-mingled meals is available in "Module 2: Introduction to Preschool Meal Patterns" of the CSDE's Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs.

How the Meal Pattern of the Older Grades Applies to Co-Mingled Meals/Snacks

When SFAs choose to use the meal pattern of the older grades for preschoolers during co-mingled meal or afterschool snacks, all daily and weekly meal pattern requirements for the older grades also apply to preschool meals. The examples below show how the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns of the older grades apply to co-mingled meals.

Example 1: Co-mingled meals at breakfast or lunch

The breakfast and lunch menu for preschoolers co-mingled with older grades must meet the following requirements:

- the minimum daily and weekly portions required by the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for the older grades (such as the lunch meal pattern for grades K-5 or the breakfast meal pattern for grades K-5);
- the weekly dietary specifications (nutrition standards) for calorie ranges and limits for saturated fat and sodium required by the meal pattern for the older grades;

> Effective with school year 2027-28 (beginning July 1, 2027), the USDA final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, establishes a new dietary specification for added sugars (less than 10 percent of calories).

- the weekly WGR requirement required by the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for the older grades, i.e., at least 80 percent of all grain foods at breakfast must be WGR and at least 80 percent of all grain foods at lunch must be WGR,
- the weekly juice limit at breakfast required by the SBP meal pattern for the older grades, i.e., the total amount of all fruit and vegetable juice offered during the week cannot exceed 50 percent of the total amount of all fruits and vegetables offered during the week;
- the weekly fruit juice limit at lunch required by the NSLP meal pattern for the older grades, i.e., the total amount of all fruit juice offered during the week cannot exceed 50 percent of the total amount of all fruits offered during the week;

- the weekly vegetable juice limit at lunch required by the NSLP meal pattern for the older grades, i.e., the total amount of all vegetable juice offered during the week cannot exceed 50 percent of the total amount of all vegetables offered during the week;

- the minimum weekly servings of the five vegetable subgroups at lunch required by the NSLP meal pattern for the older grades, i.e., dark green, red/orange, beans, peas, and lentils, starchy, and other vegetables; and

- the milk variety requirement required by the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for the older grades, i.e., schools must offer at least two different milk choices and at least one choice must be unflavored. Flavored milk is allowed as a milk choice for preschoolers when meals are co-mingled. Flavored milk served in reimbursable meals and snacks cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces.

Breakfast and lunch menus must also meet all crediting requirements of the NSLP and SBP meal pattern for grades K-12. In addition, if the school implements offer versus serve (OVS) for the older grades at breakfast and lunch, the same OVS requirements for the older grades also apply to reimbursable meals for preschoolers. This is the only situation when OVS is allowed for preschoolers. Without co-mingling, OVS is not allowed for preschool meals (refer to "Offer versus Serve (OVS)" in this section).

Example 2: Co-mingled snacks

The snack menu for preschoolers co-mingled with older grades must meet the following requirements:

- the minimum portions required by the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12;

- the weekly WGR requirement required by the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12, i.e., at least 80 percent of all grain foods at snack must be WGR;

- the weekly juice limit required by the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12, i.e., the total amount of all vegetable and fruit juices offered during the week cannot exceed 50 percent of the total amount of all vegetables and fruits offered during the week; and

- the types of milk allowed by the ASP meal patterns for grades K-12, e.g., whole milk, reduced fat (2%), low-fat (1%) milk, and fat-free milk. Flavored milk is allowed for preschoolers when meals are co-mingled. Flavored milk served in reimbursable meals and snacks cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces.

Snack menus must also meet all crediting requirements of the ASP meal pattern for grades K-12.

Reasons to Avoid Co-mingled Meal Service

The USDA strongly encourages SFAs to find ways to serve grade-appropriate meals and afterschool snacks to preschoolers and older students to best address their nutritional needs. There are several reasons why SFAs should avoid using mingled meals, whenever possible.

1. Serving preschoolers separately from older students may allow for closer supervision of the younger children, thereby allowing staff to better assist students with food packaging and monitor mealtime behaviors that may increase the risk of choking.

2. A separate family-style meal service allows preschool children to serve themselves, which can help children develop independence and build self-confidence.

3. Younger children may feel distracted or overwhelmed by older children, which may affect the amount that they eat within the provided mealtime.

4. The preschool meal pattern provides the amounts and types of foods at meals that most younger children need for healthy growth and development.

For more information, refer to USDA Memo SP 37-2017: *Flexibility for Co-Mingled Preschool Meals: Questions and Answers* and the USDA's resource, Serving School Meals to Preschoolers, and visit the "Co-mingled Meals and Afterschool Snacks" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

> The preschool meal patterns provide the amounts and types of foods that most younger children need for healthy growth and development. The USDA strongly encourages SFAs to find ways to serve grade-appropriate meals and afterschool snacks to preschoolers and older students to best address their nutritional needs.

The USDA recommends using the specific grade-appropriate meal pattern for each grade group whenever possible because this provides the most appropriate foods and portions for each grade group.

When Preschoolers Must Select at Least ½ Cup of Fruits or Vegetables

Preschoolers must select at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables when the following three conditions apply:

- the preschoolers and older students (such as grades K-5 or grades K-8) are co-mingled, i.e., both groups are served together in the same service area at the same time;
- the SFA chooses to use the meal pattern for the older grades (such as grades K-5 or grades K-8) for both groups; and
- the SFA implements OVS.

Under these circumstances only, the OVS requirements for grades K-12 below also apply to preschoolers.

- For a reimbursable lunch, preschoolers must take at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving of at least two other components.
- For a reimbursable breakfast, preschoolers must take at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the full serving of at least two other food items.

For guidance on OVS for grades K-12 (including co-mingled meals), refer to the CSDE's Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs webpage.



When the Preschool Meal Patterns Apply

SFAs must follow the preschool meal patterns when meals are served to preschoolers in a different area (such as a separate serving line or classroom meals) or at a different time than older grades. The USDA allows the option to serve the meal pattern of the older grades to preschoolers only when meals are served to preschoolers and older grades in the same service area at the same time.

Resources for Co-Mingled Meal Service

The websites and resources below provide guidance on co-mingled meal service.

- Co-mingled Meals and Afterschool Snacks ("Meal Service" section of CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/meal-service#Comingled

- Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs, Module 2: Introduction to Preschool Meal Patterns (CSDE): https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/preschool-meal-pattern-training

- Serving School Meals to Preschoolers (UDSA): https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/serving-school-meals-preschoolers

- USDA Memo SP 37-2017: Flexibility for Co-Mingled Preschool Meals: Questions and Answers: https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/flexibility-co-mingled-preschool-meals-questions-and-answers

For additional guidance and resources, visit the "Co-mingled Meals and Afterschool Snacks" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

5 — Field Trip Meals

Meals offered to students for school-supervised field trips are reimbursable if they meet the meal pattern requirements for each age group and are served and consumed as part of a school-related function. These functions must be part of the curriculum, as defined by the CSDE, and cannot be extracurricular events.

Field trip meals for preschoolers must meet the requirements below. For detailed guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Requirements for Field Trip Meals in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*.

Meal Pattern Requirements for Field Trips

To be reimbursable, field trip meals must meet the same requirements as meals served on school premises. They must include the minimum quantities of the required meal components for each meal or snack (refer to "Overview of Preschool Meal Patterns" in section 1).

Must offer fluid milk

SFAs must offer the appropriate type of fluid milk for each age group with all field trip meals. The preschool meal patterns for age 1 require unflavored whole milk for age 1. The allowable type of milk for the preschool meal patterns for ages 2-5 include unflavored whole milk, reduced fat (2%) milk, low-fat (1%) milk, and fat-free milk. Juice, water, or any other beverages cannot substitute for fluid milk on field trips.

SFAs might consider using aseptically packaged milk for field trips. Unopened aseptically packaged milk is safe to consume at room temperature but should be kept cold so it is acceptable to children. Milk tastes best when served at 35°F.



Meal modifications for disability reasons

SFAs must modify field trip meals as appropriate for children whose disability restricts their diet (refer to the CSDE's resource, *Overview of the Requirements for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs*). For detailed guidance on the meal modification requirements for disability reasons, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications in School Nutrition Programs* and visit the CSDE's Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Point-of-service Meal Counts for Field Trips

Staff supervising the field trip must follow the appropriate procedures for point-of-service meal counts (refer to "Point-of-service meal/snack counts" in section 1). For field trips, the point of service is the moment in the meal service at the field trip site where staff can accurately determine that the child has been served all required meal components for a reimbursable meal.

The USDA does not allow any other methods to determine field trip meal counts, such as field trip attendance, orders for field trip meals, the number of meals sent on the field trip, or the number of meals returned from the field trip. Meal counts must be recorded by trained staff who are familiar with the meal pattern requirements and can recognize reimbursable meals.

SFAs must develop a local process to ensure that staff take accurate point-of-service meal counts for field trips. The CSDE recommends developing a SOP for field trips that includes meal count procedures (refer to 'Recommended SOP for Field Trip Meals " in this section).

Food Safety for Field Trips

Field trip meals must follow appropriate food safety procedures and comply with Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP). The greatest food safety concern is ensuring that foods defined by the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) Food Code as "Time/Temperature Control for Safety Food" (TCS) stay at proper temperatures during transport and service.

The SFA's SOP for field trip meals must include appropriate food safety procedures (such as ice packs and coolers) to ensure that field trip meals stay at proper temperatures. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Requirements for Field Trip Meals in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*.

Recommended SOP for Field Trip Meals

The CSDE encourages SFAs to develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) with clear written procedures for field trip meals. The SOP should include information on how to identify reimbursable meals, instructions for conducting point-of-service meal counts, food safety requirements, and a plan for informing substitutes and volunteers of the requirements for field trip meals.

For an example of a field trip SOP, refer to the Iowa State University's *Standard Operating Procedure: Field Trip Meals*. For more examples of SOPs, refer to the CSDE's *Sample Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN) Standard Operating Procedures webpage.

Resources for Field Trip Meals

The websites and resources below provide guidance on field trip meals.

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

- Standard Operating Procedure: Field Trip Meals (Iowa State University): https://iastate.app.box.com/s/umtbvbe21qgrd5qy2pwan22ui9cavw3q

- Standard Operating Procedures (Institute of Child Nutrition webpage): https://theicn.org/icn-resources-a-z/standard-operating-procedures/

For additional guidance, visit the "Field Trips" section of the CSDE's Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs webpage.



6 — Prohibition of Gender Separation

In general, the USDA's nondiscrimination laws and policies in 7 CFR Parts 15, 15a, and 15b do not permit intuitions participating in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs to separate children on any protected basis during the service of reimbursable meals or snacks. Federal law prohibits discrimination based on gender at any educational institution receiving federal assistance.

USDA Exceptions

The USDA allows two exceptions to the prohibition of gender-separated meal service.

Coeducational schools and school-based sites: The USDA recognizes religious exemptions granted by the federal Department of Education (ED) without prior express approval. ED guidelines allow school and school-based sites to apply for an exemption when federal law prohibiting gender separation is inconsistent with the institution's religious tenets. These exemptions apply broadly to operations, including the meal service at a given site, such as a faith-based school. Additionally, ED guidelines specifically allow for the approval of gender-separate instruction at public primary and secondary non-vocational schools that could take a variety of forms. Since the general rule is that gender separation during meal service is prohibited, a coeducational school may not use limited ED approval of gender-separate instruction to justify blanket gender separation during meal service. Limited exemptions in these situations must be approved by the USDA.

Other institutions and organizations: State agencies may approve exemptions allowing separation by gender during meal service without express prior approval from the USDA in the following circumstances:

- meal service at religious institutions operating under the dictates of the religion with which they are affiliated;
- meal service at juvenile correctional facilities where combining members of the opposite gender would present a potential safety risk; and
- meal service at facilities that fully separate by gender as part of their normal operations, e.g., gender-separated summer camps.

When requesting an exemption, the institution must submit the request in writing to the CSDE and specify which reason applies and why separation by gender is necessary.

6 | Prohibition of Gender Separation

The two exceptions described above are the only acceptable bases for gender separation during meal service in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs. Any gender separation not based on the ED or USDA approval processes is strictly prohibited.

Situations that do not clearly fit into any of the exemptions outlined above may be considered on a case-by-case basis by the CSDE in direct consultation with the USDA Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) Regional Office, including the FNA Civil Rights Office and appropriate FNA National Office Child Nutrition Program staff.

For more information, refer to USDA Memo SP 31 2015, CACFP 12-2015, and SFSP 14-2015: *Guidance on Prohibition of Separation by Gender during Child Nutrition Program Meal Service*.



7 — Water Availability During Meal Service

The NSLP regulations (7 CFR 210.10(a)(1)(i)) and SBP regulations (7 CFR 220.8(a)(1)) require that schools and institutions must make plain potable water available without restriction to students at no charge during the service of reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. Potable water is water that is safe for human consumption.

“Available without restriction” means that students can freely access the water in the location where the meals and afterschool snacks are served. For example, if the SFA meets the water requirement with a water fountain that is in the cafeteria or immediately adjacent, students must be allowed to leave their tables to access the water fountain during the meal service.

The water must be unflavored. Schools cannot add sliced fruits or vegetables to water for flavor, such as orange and lemon slices or sliced cucumbers.

Overview of Water Requirements

The requirement for water availability applies to the NSLP, SBP, SSO, and ASP.

- **NSLP (including SSO school sites):** Water must be available at any location where lunch is served. This includes the cafeteria and any other meal service areas outside of the cafeteria, such as lunch carts, meals served in the classroom, and meals served during in-school suspension.
- **SBP (including SSO school sites):** Water must be available when breakfast is served in the cafeteria. The water requirement does not apply to breakfast meal service outside of the cafeteria, such as breakfast in the classroom.
- **ASP:** Water must be available during the afterschool snack service.

All schools implementing the NSLP, SBP, SSO, and ASP must meet these requirements. The water requirement does not apply to field trips where reimbursable meals are served. However, the USDA encourages schools to make water available for all school-related functions, including field trips.

Examples of How to Offer Water

SFAs may implement the water requirement in a variety of ways. Some examples are listed below.



- Offer water pitchers and cups on tables or in an area that is easily accessible to all students during meals and afterschool snacks.
- Provide a water fountain or a faucet that allows unrestricted access for students to fill their own bottles or cups with drinking water. This option must comply with the requirements below.
    1. The location of the water fountain or faucet must be in the foodservice area or immediately adjacent. An example is a water fountain that is right outside the door to the foodservice area and accessible to all students during the meal period.
    2. The water fountain or faucet must be operational.
    3. Staff members who supervise students in the cafeteria, such as lunch aides or paraprofessionals, must allow students to leave their tables to access the water fountain or faucet during the meal service, and should be trained on this requirement. Students do not have unrestricted access to water if staff members deny their requests to get a drink of water.
- Offer bottled water at no cost to students.

SFAs may make plain potable water available in any way that 1) is without restriction where reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks are served; and 2) meets the USDA's requirements for an allowable cost to the nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA) (refer to "Allowable Costs for Offering Water" in this section).

Considerations for Offering Water

There are some important considerations to keep in mind when offering water to students during the service of reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks.

- While water must be made available to students during the meal and afterschool snack service, water is not a meal component and is not part of reimbursable meals or afterschool snacks. Students are not required to take water.
- SFAs cannot promote or offer water or any other beverage as an alternative selection to fluid milk throughout the food service area. Commercially packaged water and potable drinking water should not be made available in any manner that interferes with students' selection of the required meal components of reimbursable meals, including milk. For example, water cannot be served from the milk cooler.

> Water is not a meal component and is not part of reimbursable meals or afterschool snacks.



Allowable Costs for Offering Water

The USDA does not provide any separate funding or reimbursement for the potable water requirement and SFAs cannot claim reimbursement for water. However, SFAs may use funds from the NSFSA to cover the allowable costs of providing potable water to students. An allowable cost is a cost that is considered reasonable, necessary, and allocable to the school nutrition programs. Some examples of possible allowable costs associated with providing potable water to students are listed below.

- Purchasing pitchers or cups that would be filled with water from the faucet or provided to students to fill with water from the faucet.
- Purchasing a 5-gallon dispenser for water. This cost would be allowable if the SFA has determined that this method of providing water is cost efficient and practical.
- Covering the cost of testing tap water and water fountains that will be used by students. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends that all schools routinely test drinking water for lead and perform regular maintenance to ensure that drinking water is safe.

The determination of whether these costs are allowable for an individual SFA depends on their specific circumstances. Costs related to the purchase of potable water for consumption by students must always be reasonable, necessary, and allocable to the school nutrition programs. An allowable cost for one SFA might not be an allowable cost for another.

For guidance on how to determine allowable costs for the NSFSA, refer to the "General Criteria for Allowable Costs" section (page 13) of the USDA's manual, *Indirect Costs: Guidance for State Agencies & School Food Authorities*.

Resources for Offering Water

The websites and resources below provide guidance on offering water to students during the meal service.

- Increasing Access to Drinking Water in Schools (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention):
  https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-schools/media/pdfs/water_access_in_schools_508_2.pdf

- Indirect Costs: Guidance for State Agencies & School Food Authorities (USDA):
  https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/indirect-cost-guidance

- USDA Memo SP 28-2011 Revised: Child Nutrition Reauthorization 2010: Water Availability During National School Lunch Program Meal Service:
  https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/water-availability-during-nslp-meal-service

- USDA Memo SP 39-2019: Clarification on the Milk and Water Requirements in the School Meal Programs:
  https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/clarification-milk-and-water-requirements-school-meal-program

- USDA Memo SP 49-2016 and CACFP 18-2016: Resources for Making Potable Water Available in Schools and Child Care Facilities:
  https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/resources-making-potable-water-available-schools-and-child-care-facilities-0

- Water Access in Schools (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention):
  https://www.cdc.gov/school-nutrition/water-access/index.html

- Water Availability for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage)
  https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/water-availability-for-the-school-nutrition-programs

- Water Safety (USDA):
  https://www.fna.usda.gov/fs/water-safety

- What's in a Meal Module 16: Water Availability During Meal Service (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#module16

For additional guidance and resources, visit the CSDE's Water Availability for School Nutrition Programs webpage. Training on the water requirement is available in Module 16: Water

Availability During Meal Service of the CSDE's training program, *What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs*.



8 — Resources

This section includes additional resources and websites for the school nutrition programs. More links to information on the federal and state requirements and guidance for school meals are available on the CSDE's Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs webpage. For a list of resources on the preschool meal patterns and crediting requirements, refer to the CSDE's *Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the School Nutrition Programs*.

Meal Pattern Legislation and Requirements

C.G.S. Section 10-221q. Sale of beverages:
https://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_170.htm#sec_10-221q

CACFP Meal Pattern Updates (CSDE's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/child-and-adult-care-food-program#MealPatternUpdates

Child Nutrition Programs Legislation and Regulations (USDA webpage):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/legislation-regulations

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for the CHild and Adult Care Food Prgram (CACFP) (7 CFR 226):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-226

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for the National School Lunch Program (7 CFR 210):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-210

Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) for the School Breakfast Program (7 CFR 220):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-220

Laws and Regulations for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/laws-and-regulations-for-child-nutrition-programs

Meal Pattern Changes (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Program webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs#Meal_Pattern_Changes

Meal Patterns (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs#MealPatterns

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Nutrition Standards for CACFP Meals and Snacks (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/nutrition-standards

Questions and Answers on Connecticut Statutes for School Foods and Beverages (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/hfc/questions_answers_connecticut_statutes_school_foods_beverages.pdf

Summary of Final Rule Updates to the Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/mealpattern/summary_final_rule_snp_meal_patterns.pdf

USDA Final Rule: Child and Adult Care Food Program: Meal Pattern Revisions Related to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (81 FR 24347):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/fr-042516

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 Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs (91 FR 25073):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/fr-050826

USDA Memo CACFP 08-2017: Questions and Answers on the Updated Meal Pattern Requirements for the Child and Adult Care Food Program:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/qas-updated-meal-pattern-requirements

USDA Memo CACFP 15-2016: Optional Best Practices to Further Improve Nutrition in the CACFP:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cacfp/optional-best-practices-further-improve-nutrition-cacfp

USDA Memo SP 01-2019 and CACFP 01-2019: Guidance for FY19: Updated CACFP Meal Patterns and Updated NSLP and SBP Infant and Preschool Meal Patterns:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/updated-cacfp-meal-patterns-and-updated-nslp-sbp-infant-and-preschool-meal

USDA Memo SP 19-2024, CACFP 07-2024, and SFSP 12-2024: Initial Implementation Memorandum: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/initial-implementation-meal-patterns-dga

USDA Memo SP 37-2017: Flexibility for Co-Mingled Preschool Meals: Questions and Answers:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/flexibility-co-mingled-preschool-meals-questions-and-answers

Meal Service

Co-mingled Meals and Afterschool Snacks ("Meal Service" section of CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/meal-service#Comingled

Meal Service (CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/meal-service

Serving School Meals to Preschoolers (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/serving-school-meals-preschoolers

USDA Memo SP 37-2017: Flexibility for Co-Mingled Preschool Meals: Questions and Answers:
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/flexibility-co-mingled-preschool-meals-questions-and-answers

Program Guidance

Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/afterschool-snack-program

Beverage Requirements (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/beverage-requirements

Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/child-nutrition-programs

CT Fresh Ed (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/ct-fresh-ed

Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA) Documents and Resources (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/resources

Food Labeling & Nutrition (FDA):
https://www.fda.gov/food/food-labeling-nutrition

Manuals and Guides for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/manuals-and-guides-for-child-nutrition-programs

National School Lunch Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/national-school-lunch-program

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Nutrition Education (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/nutrition-education

Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/operational-memoranda-for-school-nutrition-programs

Procurement for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/procurement-for-school-nutrition-programs

Production Records for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/production-records-for-school-nutrition-programs

Program Guidance for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/program-guidance-school-nutrition-programs

Resources for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/resources-for-child-nutrition-programs

School Breakfast Program (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/school-breakfast-program

School Lunch Tray and Table Talk (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/school-lunch-tray-and-table-talk

Seamless Summer Option of the NSLP (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/seamless-summer-option-sso-of-the-nslp

Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-school-nutrition-programs

Training for Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/training-for-child-nutrition-programs

Glossary

Administrative Review (AR): The state agency's comprehensive offsite and onsite evaluation of all SFAs participating in the NSLP and SBP. The review cycle is every three years for each SFA and includes a review of critical and general areas. For more information, visit the CSDE's Administrative Review for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Afterschool Snack Program (ASP): The USDA's federally assisted snack program implemented through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). The ASP provides cash reimbursement to help schools serve snacks to children in afterschool activities aimed at promoting the health and well-being of children and youth. Schools must provide children with regularly scheduled activities in an organized, structured, and supervised environment that includes educational or enrichment activities, e.g., mentoring/tutoring programs. Programs must meet state or local licensing requirements and health and safety standards. For more information, visit the CSDE's Afterschool Snack Program webpage.

CACFP meal patterns for children: The required meal components and minimum serving sizes that facilities participating in the CACFP must provide to receive federal reimbursement for meals and snacks served to children. The CACFP meal patterns apply to children ages 1-12; children ages 15 and younger of migrant workers; children of any age with disabilities; and children through age 18 in at-risk afterschool care centers and emergency shelters. For more information, visit the "CACFP Meal Patterns for Children" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): The USDA's federally assisted meal program providing nutritious meals and afterschool snacks to children in child care centers, family day care homes, and emergency shelters, and snacks and suppers to children participating in eligible at-risk afterschool care programs. The CACFP also provides meals and afterschool snacks to adults who receive care in nonresidential adult day care centers. For more information, visit the USDA's CACFP webpage and the CSDE's CACFP webpage.

Child Nutrition Programs: The USDA's federally funded programs that provide nutritious meals and snacks to children, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP), Special Milk Program (SMP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). The CACFP also provides nutritious meals and snacks to the frail elderly in adult day care centers. For more information, visit the CSDE's Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

combination-style meal service: A method of meal service that combines pre-plated meal service and family-style meal service. Some foods in the meal are pre-plated while others are served family style.

co-mingling: The practice of serving meals to a variety of grades in the same service area at the same time, such as preschoolers and grades K-5. This practice typically occurs due to operational constraints within a school, such as limited time and space. For more information, refer to section 4.

congregate meals: Meals and afterschool snack served to and consumed by children in a supervised group setting on the premises of the SFA.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans: A federal document that provides science-based advice for Americans ages 2 and older to promote health and reduce risk for chronic diseases through diet and physical activity. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture jointly publish the *Dietary Guidelines* every five years. This document forms the basis of federal food, nutrition education and information programs. For more information, visit the Dietary Guidelines for Americans webpage.

disability: A condition in which a person has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications in School Nutrition Programs*.

family-style meal service: A method of meal service that allows children to serve themselves from common platters of food with assistance from supervising adults, if needed. For more information, refer to "Family-style Meal Service" in section 3.

fluid milk substitutes: Plant-based beverages designed to replace cow's milk, such as soy milk, almond milk, rice milk, and oat milk. Fluid milk substitutes may replace regular cow's milk in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks for children who do not consume regular milk due to non-disability reasons, if they meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes. Only certain brands of fluid milk substitutes meet these standards. For more information, refer to "nutrition standards for milk substitutes" in this section and the CSDE's resources, *Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Determining if Nondairy Milk Substitutes Meet the USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in School Nutrition Programs*.

food item: A specific food offered within the meal components that comprise reimbursable meals in the CACFP. A food item may contain one or more meal components or more than one serving of a single component. For example, macaroni and cheese is one food item that provides two meal components (grains and MMA). A 2-ounce whole grain bagel is one food item that provides 2 oz eq of grains.

meal components: The five food groups that comprise reimbursable meals in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs, including milk, fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats/meat alternates. For information on the individual meal components, visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

meal pattern: The required meal components and minimum servings that schools and institutions participating in the USDA's Child Nutrition Programs must provide to receive federal reimbursement for meals and afterschool snacks served to children. For more information, refer to the "Overview of Preschool Meal Patterns" in section 1.

meal: A grain made by coarsely grinding corn, oats, wheat, or other grains. Whole grain, enriched, or fortified meal credits toward the grains component of the USDA's meal patterns.

meals: Refer to "reimbursable meals" in this section.

medical statement: A document signed by a state-licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian that identifies the specific medical conditions and appropriate meal modifications for a participant with special dietary needs due to disability or non-disability reasons. The USDA requires that medical statements for disability reasons must include: 1) information about the child's physical or mental impairment that is sufficient to allow the adult day care center to understand how it restricts the child's diet; 2) an explanation of what must be done to accommodate the child's disability; and 3) if appropriate, the food or foods to be omitted and recommended alternatives. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the "Medical Statements" section of the CSDE's Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

menu item: Any planned main dish, vegetable, fruit, bread, grain, or milk that is part of the reimbursable meal. Menu items consist of food items.

nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA): The restricted account in which all the revenue from all food service operations conducted by the SFA, principally for the benefit of school children, is retained and used only for the operation or improvement of the nonprofit school food service. For more information, visit the "Nonprofit School Food Service Account (NSFSA)" section of the CSDE's Financial Management for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

point-of-service meal/snack counts: The moment in the food service operation where a determination can accurately be made that a reimbursable free, reduced-price, or paid meal has been served to an eligible child or that a reimbursable snack has been served to an eligible child (refer to "Point-of-service meal/snack counts" in section 1).

potable water: Water that is safe for human consumption.

pre-plated meal service: A method of meal service where staff pre-plate each child's plate and cup with the minimum portion of each meal component, based on the meal pattern requirements for each age group. For more information, refer to "Pre-plated meal service" in section 3.

registered dietitian (RD) or registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN): The Commission on Dietetic Registration defines a RD and RDN as someone who has completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree at a U.S. regionally accredited university or college and course work accredited or approved by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND); completed an ACEND-accredited supervised practice program at a health-care facility, community agency, or a foodservice corporation or combined with undergraduate or graduate studies; passed a national examination administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR); and completed continuing professional educational requirements to maintain registration. For more information, visit the AND's What is a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist website and the CDR's Registered Dietitian (RD) or Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) Certification website.

reimbursable meals and snacks: Meals and afterschool snacks that meet the meal pattern requirements of the USDA regulations and are eligible for USDA funds. Reimbursable meals contain the minimum serving of each required meal component.

serving size or portion: The weight, measure, or number of pieces or slices of a food or beverage. For and snacks to be reimbursable, SFAs must provide the minimum servings specified in the preschool meal patterns.

state-licensed healthcare professional: An individual who is authorized to write medical prescriptions under state law and is recognized by the State Department of Public Health (DPH). In Connecticut, recognized medical authorities include physicians (MD), physician assistants (PA) and certified physician assistants (PAC), doctors of osteopathy (DO), and advanced practice registered nurses (APRN), i.e., nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, and certified nurse anesthetists who are licensed as APRNs. For more information, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs* and visit the "Medical Statements" section of the CSDE's Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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