National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Preschool Meal Pattern

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

Lunch meal components [1]	**Minimum for ages 1-2**	**Minimum for ages 3-5**
Milk, fluid [2]	4 fluid ounces (½ cup)	6 fluid ounces (¾ cup)
Meats/meat alternates (MMA), ounce equivalents (oz eq) [3]	**1 oz eq =**	**1½ oz eq =**
Lean meat, poultry, or fish; cheese; alternate protein products (APPs) [4]; or tempeh [5]	1 ounce	1½ ounces
Surimi [6]	3 ounces	4.4 ounces
Tofu [7]	2.2 ounces (¼ cup)	3.3 ounces (⅜ cup)
Cottage cheese	2 ounces (¼ cup)	3 ounces (⅜ cup)
Egg, large	½	¾
Beans, peas, and lentils [8]	¼ cup	⅜ cup
Peanut butter, soy nut butter, or other nut or seed butters	2 tablespoons	3 tablespoons
Peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts, or seeds [9]	1 ounce	1½ ounces
Yogurt or soy yogurt, plain or flavored, unsweetened or sweetened [10]	4 ounces (½ cup)	6 ounces (¾ cup)
Vegetables, cups [11, 12, 13]	⅛ cup	¼ cup
Fruits, cups [12, 14]	⅛ cup	¼ cup
Grains, oz eq [15, 16, 17, 18]	**½ oz eq =**	**½ oz eq =**
Whole grain-rich (WGR) or enriched bread or bread product, e.g., biscuit, roll, or muffin	½ oz eq [18]	½ oz eq [18]
WGR, enriched, or fortified cooked breakfast cereal [19], cereal grain [20], or pasta	¼ cup	¼ cup
WGR, enriched, or fortified ready-to-eat (RTE) breakfast cereal (dry, cold): Flakes or rounds [19]	½ cup	½ cup
Puffed [19]	¾ cup	¾ cup
Granola [19]	⅛ cup	⅛ cup

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Menu Planning Notes

[1] Lunches must include the minimum serving of the five meal components. Use the USDA's *Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs* (FBG) to determine how foods credit and the amount that provides the required meal pattern serving. Commercial processed foods not listed in the FBG require a Child Nutrition (CN) label or product formulation statement (PFS) to document crediting information. School food authorities must verify PFS forms for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the product in reimbursable meals and snacks. Foods made from scratch must have a standardized recipe that documents the crediting information per serving. For information on crediting documentation, refer to the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) resources, *Using Child Nutrition (CN) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs*, *Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs*, and *Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs*, and visit the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage. The CSDE's Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs provides comprehensive guidance on meeting the preschool meal pattern and crediting requirements.

[2] Milk must be pasteurized and meet state and local standards. Unflavored whole milk is required for age 1. Effective June 8, 2026, the U. S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) final rule, *Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs*, allows unflavored whole milk, reduced fat (2%) milk, low-fat (1%) milk, and fat-free milk for ages 2 and older. These allowable types of milk include lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk, acidified milk, cultured milk, cultured buttermilk, and Ultra High Temperature (UHT). For children whose dietary needs do not constitute a disability, school food authorities may choose to offer optional nondairy milk substitutes (such as soy milk) that meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes (7 CFR 210.10(d)(2)(ii)). For guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs*. For more information, visit the "Milk" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[3] The serving of MMA refers to the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish, e.g., cooked lean meat without bone, breading, binders, fillers, or other ingredients. Commercial processed products (such as combination entrees, deli meats, hot dogs, and sausages) require a CN label or PFS to document crediting information unless they are listed in the FBG. For crediting guidance on commercial products, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Crediting Deli Meats in the School Nutrition Programs.* The USDA's CACFP best practices recommend serving only lean meats, nuts, and legumes; limiting processed meats to one serving per week; and serving only low-fat or reduced-fat natural cheese. For information on the MMA component, visit the "Meats and Meat Alternates" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[4] APPs must meet the requirements in appendix A of 7 CFR 210. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the School Nutrition Programs*.

[5] For 1 ounce of tempeh to credit as 1 oz eq of MMA, the product's ingredients must include only soybeans (or other beans, peas, and lentils), water, tempeh culture, and for some varieties, vinegar, seasonings, and herbs. Tempeh products that contain other ingredients require a CN label or PFS to document crediting information.

[6] Surimi seafood is a pasteurized, ready-to-eat, restructured seafood product usually made from pollock (fish). A CN label or PFS is required for commercial products that indicate a different crediting amount.

[7] Tofu must contain at least 5 grams of protein in 2.2 ounces (¼ cup) to credit as 1 oz eq of MMA. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the School Nutrition Programs*.

[8] Beans, peas, and lentils credit as either the MMA component or the vegetables component but one serving cannot credit as both meal components in the same meal. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils in the School Nutrition Programs*.

[9] Creditable nuts and seeds include almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, filberts, macadamia nuts, peanuts, pecans, walnuts, pine nuts, pistachios, and soy nuts. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs*. **Note:** Children younger than 4 are at the highest risk of choking. The USDA recommends that any nuts or seeds served to young children are in prepared foods and are ground or finely chopped.

[10] Yogurt and soy yogurt cannot exceed 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (no more than 2 grams of added sugars per ounce). For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Yogurt in the School Nutrition Programs*.

[11] The vegetables component includes fresh, frozen, canned, and rehydrated dried vegetables, and pasteurized 100 percent vegetable juice. Vegetables credit based on volume (cups), except raw leafy greens credit as half the volume served, e.g., 1 cup of lettuce or spinach credits as ½ cup of the vegetables component. A serving of canned vegetables must be drained. Dried vegetables (such as potato flakes and dried soup mix) credit based on their rehydrated volume and require a PFS. The USDA's CACFP best practices recommend that preschool menus include at least one serving per week of each vegetable subgroup (dark green; red/orange; beans, peas, and lentils; starchy; and other). For information on the vegetables component, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Vegetable Subgroups in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*, and visit the "Vegetables" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[12] Pasteurized 100 percent juice credits as either the vegetables component or fruits component at only one preschool meal or snack per day. The juice limit includes all fruit and vegetable juices, frozen pops made from 100 percent juice, and pureed fruits and vegetables in smoothies. The USDA's CACFP best practices recommend serving whole fruits (fresh, frozen, canned, and dried) more often than juice. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resources, *Crediting Juices in the School Nutrition Programs* and *Crediting Smoothies in the School Nutrition Programs*.

[13] Vegetables may substitute for the entire fruits component at any lunch. If the lunch menu includes two servings of vegetables, they must be different kinds.

[14] The fruits component includes fresh, frozen, and dried fruits, canned fruit in juice, water, or light syrup, and pasteurized 100 percent fruit juice. The creditable serving of canned fruit in 100 percent juice may include the juice but cannot include water or syrup. Fruits credit based on volume (cups), except dried fruits credit as twice the volume served, e.g., ¼ cup of raisins credits as ½ cup of the fruits component. For information on the fruits component, visit the "Fruits" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[15] Commercial grain products and standardized recipes must be made with creditable grains (whole grains, enriched grains, bran, and germ) and must be WGR or enriched. For information on identifying creditable grains, refer to the CSDE's resources, *How to Identify Creditable Grains for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs, Crediting Whole Grains in the School Nutrition Programs,* and *Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs*, and visit the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[16] At least one serving of grains per day must be WGR. The USDA's CACFP best practices recommend at least two servings of WGR grains per day. To meet the preschool meal pattern WGR criteria, foods must contain at least 50 percent whole grains and the remaining grain ingredients must be enriched, bran, or germ. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's *Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the CACFP* and visit "Whole Grain-rich Requirement" in the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for the Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage.

[17] Grain-based desserts do not credit in the preschool meal patterns. Examples include cookies, piecrusts in sweet pies, doughnuts, cereal bars, granola bars, sweet rolls, pastries, toaster pastries, cake, and brownies. Sweet crackers (such as graham crackers and animal crackers) are allowed but the CSDE recommends limiting them to no more than twice per week between all preschool meals and snacks. For more information, visit the USDA's webpage, Grain-based Desserts in the CACFP.

[18] To credit as the required oz eq, the serving of a commercial grain product or standardized recipe must provide either: 1) the required serving weight (groups A-E) or volume (groups H-I) in the USDA's Exhibit A chart (refer to the CSDE's resources, *Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs* and *How to Use the Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs*); or 2) the minimum creditable grains per serving (refer to the CSDE's resources, *Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents for the Meal Patterns for School Nutrition Programs* and *When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs*). For more information, visit "Serving Requirements" in the "Grains" section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

[19] RTE and cooked breakfast cereals must be WGR, enriched, or fortified, and cannot exceed 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce. For crediting guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the School Nutrition Programs.*

[20] Examples of cereal grains include amaranth, barley, buckwheat, cornmeal, corn grits, kasha, millet, oats, quinoa, wheat berries, and rolled wheat.

For more information on the preschool meal patterns, visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage or contact the school nutrition programs staff at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/preschool/lunch_meal_pattern_preschool.pdf.

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