

TEAM NUTRITION

School Meals

Grab n' Go

Quick tips to improve your meal service



Are You Adding to Meals From Home?

Using Offer Versus Serve at School Lunch

Offer versus Serve (OVS) is a type of meal service that can be used in the USDA's National School Lunch Program (NSLP)'s Seamless Summer Option (SSO), NSLP, and School Breakfast Program (SBP). Lunches offered through SSO and NSLP are intended to be a full meal for students, meeting approximately one-third of their nutritional needs for the day. School lunch is not meant to supplement meals brought from home or foods purchased outside of the NSLP program. A lunch provided through the SSO or NSLP helps students learn about MyPlate and all of the components of a balanced meal.

Offer versus Serve allows students to decline some of the food offered, which can help reduce food waste and give students more choices, while still providing well-balanced meals. While OVS meal service allows students to decline some of the foods offered at lunch, USDA requires that **all students** must be offered a full meal that includes **all five meal components**.

Schools that wish to offer individual meal components (or a limited number of components and not the full meal) to students may do so outside of the SSO reimbursement.

OVS in Action at Lunch*

Offer All Meal Components to All Students: If your school offers lunch using OVS, be sure to offer all meal components to all students. All components must be offered in at least the minimum required amounts for meals to be reimbursable.

Allow Students to Choose: Students may select all five meal components for a reimbursable meal. Under OVS, students must select at least 3 components and one choice must include at least a ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable.

*OVS is required at lunch for senior high school students, and optional for all other grades. However, for School Year 2021-2022, this requirement may be waived in your State. For more information about this and other flexibilities, please contact your State agency.

Required Meal Component	Daily Minimum Requirements for Each Grade Level			
	K-5	6-8	K-8	9-12
Vegetables	¾ cup	¾ cup	¾ cup	1 cup
Fruits	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	1 cup
Grains	1 oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq	2 oz eq
Meats/Meat Alternates	1 oz eq	1 oz eq	1 oz eq	2 oz eq
Fluid Milk	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup

Creating Clear Communications about School Meals and Student's Options

Encourage all students to eat school lunch and share the benefits of each meal component. Inform families about what foods are included in school meals, so they can help students with selections and reinforce nutrition education messages at home. When using OVS, make sure your school displays signs and menus that clearly show all of the available components of the reimbursable meal, what the students can select and what they must select. When everyone understands OVS, lunch lines may move more quickly and smoothly.

Does your marketing material:

- Promote the nutritional benefits of the full school meal for all students?
- Say that meals include five meal components, and that students can select all five components?
- Inform that students must select at least three meal components, including at least a ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable?

See below for examples of correct and incorrect signage.

✓ Correct

- This sign shows that students can choose all five meal components for a reimbursable lunch.
- This sign shows that students must choose at least a ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable.
- This sign targets all students.



All Kids Eat Free
Stop by for 5

5 Food Groups = Maximum Nutrition



Pick 3 food groups or more including at least a ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable.

Eating foods from each food group gives kids and teens the nutrition they need to learn, grow, and be healthy!

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✗ Incorrect

- This sign does not show that students can choose all five meal components for a reimbursable lunch.
- This sign does not show that students can pick any meal component combination, including at least a ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable, for a reimbursable lunch.
- This sign does not include all students and only targets students who bring lunch from home.



Pick 3 Free

? Bringing your lunch from home?
Add a vegetable, fruit and milk for **FREE**

 +  +  = **SCHOOL LUNCH**

Students bringing lunch from home can add a veggie, fruit and milk for free! Students can also purchase additional a la carte items.

For more information on OVS requirements, go to the [Offer Versus Serve Guidance for the NSLP and SBP](#) and check out Team Nutrition's [Offer Versus Serve Materials](#) for posters and tip sheets.



Share your activities with us on Twitter @TeamNutrition using the hashtag #TeamNutrition or by emailing us at TeamNutrition@USDA.gov.

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