

OFFER VERSUS SERVE

in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP)



Offer versus serve (OVS) is a concept that applies to menu planning and the determination of reimbursable school meals in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and Seamless Summer Food Program (SSFP). OVS allows students to decline a certain number of food components in the meal, reducing food waste and food costs, and allowing students to select the foods they prefer to eat. OVS must be implemented in senior high schools for lunch. OVS is optional for junior high schools, middle schools and elementary schools.

OVS REQUIREMENTS FOR LUNCH

The chart below summarizes the daily meal pattern requirements for lunch and the number of food components that students can decline under OVS. These requirements apply to all grade groups.

OVS Requirements at Lunch	
Must Offer Five Components ¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One serving of milk ²• One serving of fruits ³• One serving of vegetables ³• One serving of grains• One serving of meat/meat alternate	Student May Decline <ul style="list-style-type: none">• One or two food components but must take at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables ⁴
<p>¹ Serving sizes must equal at least the minimum daily required quantities for each grade group specified in the NSLP meal pattern. The menu planner determines the daily serving size to meet the required weekly amounts for each component.</p> <p>² Schools must offer at least two different varieties (fat content and/or flavor) of unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk. Whole, reduced-fat (2%) and flavored low-fat milk cannot be served.</p> <p>³ If juice is served in place of whole fruits or vegetables, it must be pasteurized 100 percent full-strength juice and cannot count for more than half of the weekly fruits component or vegetables component. For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's handout, Crediting Juice.</p> <p>⁴ Students can take ½ cup of one fruit or one vegetable or combine fruits and vegetables to meet the ½ cup serving, e.g., ¼ cup each of two different fruits, ¼ cup each of two different vegetables or ¼ cup of fruits and ¼ cup of vegetables.</p>	

For a lunch to be reimbursable under OVS, schools must meet the criteria below.

- All meals must be planned to meet the NSLP meal pattern requirements. For specific guidance on the USDA meal pattern requirements, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals](#) and [Meal Patterns](#) Web page.
- All five food components must be offered to all students including milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meat/meat alternates. Except for fluid milk, the food components may be offered in more than one food item. However, meat/meat alternates may only be offered in a main dish or in a main dish and one other food item.
- The serving sizes for all food components must equal the minimum daily required quantities for each grade group specified in the NSLP meal pattern. The menu planner determines the daily serving size to meet the required weekly amounts for each food component. The daily serving size may meet or exceed the minimum daily required quantity in the meal pattern.

Offer versus Serve in the NSLP, Continued

- Meals must be priced as a unit, i.e., students pay the same price regardless of whether they take three, four or five food components.
- Students must take at least three of the five food components offered, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum daily serving of the other chosen food components.
- Students may decline any one or two of the other required food components except for at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables. Students may take smaller portions of the declined food components. However, servings less than the minimum daily requirement do not count toward the reimbursable meal.
- If the menu planner offers the minimum daily serving size as two separate food items, the full component includes both items and students must take both to count as the full component. The chart below illustrates this concept.



OVS requires students to take at least three of the five lunch food components offered, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum daily serving of at least two other components.

Examples of Minimum Daily Component Split into Two Equal Food Items		
Meal Component and Minimum Daily Amount	Planned Menu Items	Required Student Selection for Full Component (Minimum Daily Serving)
GRADES K-5 AND 6-8		
Meat/Meat Alternates, 1 ounce equivalent	1 tablespoon of peanut butter (½ ounce equivalent) ¼ cup of yogurt (½ ounce equivalent)	Students must take both food items to count as the minimum daily serving of the meal/meat alternates component.
Grains, 1 ounce equivalent	Two packages of whole-grain crackers (½ ounce equivalent each)	Students must take both food items to count as the minimum daily serving of the grains component
Fruits, ½ cup	¼ cup of peaches ¼ cup of grapes	Students must take both food items to count as the minimum daily serving of the fruits component. Students could select only ¼ cup of fruit if they also select at least ½ cup of vegetable and two other full components (minimum daily serving).
Vegetables, ¾ cup	½ cup of carrots ¼ cup of tomatoes	Students must take both food items to count as the minimum daily serving of the vegetables component. Students could select only ½ cup of carrots if they also select two other full components (minimum daily serving). Students could select only ¼ cup of tomatoes if they also select at least ½ cup of fruit and two other full components (minimum daily serving).
GRADES 9-12		
Meat/Meat Alternates, 2 ounce equivalents	½ cup of yogurt (1 ounce equivalent) 1 ounce cheese stick (1 ounce equivalent)	Students must take both food items to count as the minimum daily serving of the meal/meat alternates component.
Grains, 2 ounce equivalents	½ cup of pasta (1 ounce equivalent) 1 ounce roll (1 ounce equivalent)	Students must take both food items to count as the minimum daily serving of the grains component.
Fruits, 1 cup	½ cup of peaches ½ cup of grapes	Students must take both food items to count as the minimum daily serving of the fruits component. Students could select only ½ cup of fruit if they also select two other full components (minimum daily serving).
Vegetables, 1 cup	½ cup of green peppers ½ cup of tomatoes	Students must take both food items to count as the minimum daily serving of the vegetables component. Students could select only ½ cup of vegetables if they also select two other full components (minimum daily serving).

- When the planned meal includes multiple food items and the student selects more than the minimum required serving size, the selected food items count as only one component toward the three required food components. For example, a lunch for grades 9-12 provides 3 ounce

Offer versus Serve in the NSLP, Continued

equivalents of grains including 1 cup of rice (2 ounce equivalents) and a 1-ounce bread stick (1 ounce equivalent). If a student selects both items, they count as only one full component (grains). For a reimbursable meal, the student must also select at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum daily serving of one other component.

EXAMPLES OF OVS AT LUNCH

Students must take at least three of the five food components offered, including at least ½ cup of fruits or vegetables and the minimum daily serving of two other components. The charts below show examples of OVS for the three grade groups.

Examples of OVS for Grades K-5 and 6-8							
Planned Lunch	Meal Components and Amounts Provided	Student Selects	Food Items *	Full Food Components ** (Minimum Daily Serving) MUST BE AT LEAST TWO	Contains at least ½ cup of F or V? MUST BE YES	Reimbursable?	
Turkey (1 ounce) and cheese (1 ounce) sandwich on whole-wheat bread (2 slices)	Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA), 2 ounce equivalents	Turkey and cheese sandwich (M/MA, G)	2	3	no	No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and M) but is missing ½ cup of F or V.	
		Low-fat milk (M)					
	Grains (G), 2 ounce equivalents	Turkey and cheese sandwich (M/MA, G)	2	3	yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and F) and includes ½ cup of F.	
		Apple (F)					
Broccoli florets (¾ cup) with low-fat dip	Vegetables (V), ¾ cup	Turkey and cheese sandwich (M/MA, G)	2	3	yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and V) and includes ¾ cup of V.	
Whole fresh apple, ½ cup	Fruits (F), ½ cup	Broccoli (V)					
Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored milk or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)	Milk (M), 1 cup	Apple (F)	3	3	yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (V, F and M) and includes ½ cup of F and ¾ cup of V.	
Cheeseburger (1 ½ ounces of cooked beef and ½ ounce of cheese) on whole-grain bun	Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA), 2 ounce equivalents	Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G)	2	3	no	No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and M) but is missing ½ cup of F or V.	
		Low-fat milk (M)					
	Grains (G), 2 ounce equivalents	Cheeseburger without bun (M/MA)	3	2	yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and M) and includes ½ cup of V.	
		Carrot sticks (V)					
	Vegetables (V), ¾ cup	Low-fat milk (M)					
		Lettuce and tomato (V)	3	2	yes	No. While the meal includes ¾ cup of V, it contains the full serving of only two food components (V and M). The full ¾-cup serving of V includes both ½ cup of carrot sticks and ¼ cup of lettuce and tomato.	
	Fruits (F), ½ cup	Carrot sticks (V)					
Low-fat milk (M)							
Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored milk or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)	Milk (M), 1 cup	Carrot sticks (V)	3	2	yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (F and M) and includes ½ cup of V.	
		Sliced apples (F)					
		Fat-free milk (M)					
		Bun (G)	3	3	yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (G, F and M) and includes ½ cup of F.	
		Sliced apples (F)					
		Fat-free milk (M)					
		Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G)	3	3	no	No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and M) but is missing ½ cup of F or V. The lettuce and tomato count as only ¼ cup of V.	
		Lettuce and tomato (V)					
		Low-fat milk (M)					

* A food item is a specific food offered within the five food components and may contain one or more food components or more than one serving of a single component. For example, an entree could provide one serving of grains and one serving of meat/meat alternates and a bagel could provide two servings of grains.

** A food component is one of the five food groups that comprise the reimbursable lunch including milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meat/meat alternates.

Offer versus Serve in the NSLP, Continued

Examples of OVS for Grades 9-12						
Planned Lunch	Meal Components and Amounts Provided	Student Selects	Food Items *	Full Food Components ** (Minimum Daily Serving) MUST BE AT LEAST TWO	Contains at least ½ cup of F or V? MUST BE YES	Reimbursable?
Cheese pizza (1 slice with 2 ounces of cheese, 2 ounces of crust) Tomato sauce on pizza (¼ cup) Coleslaw (¾ cup) Orange Juice (½ cup) Strawberries (½ cup) Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored milk or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)	Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA), 2 ounce equivalents Grains (G), 2 ounce equivalents Vegetables (V), 1 cup Fruits (F), 1 cup Milk (M), 1 cup	Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V)	1	2	no	No. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and G). It is missing at least ½ cup of F or V because the tomato sauce counts as only ¼ cup of V.
		Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V) Strawberries (F)	2	2	yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and G) and ½ cup of F. The tomato sauce counts as only ¼ cup of V.
		Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V) Orange juice (F)	2	2	yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and G) and ½ cup of F. The tomato sauce counts as only ¼ cup of V.
		Cheese pizza (M/MA, G, V) Coleslaw (V)	2	3	yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and V). The full 1-cup serving of V includes both ¼ cup of tomato sauce and ¾ cup of coleslaw.
		Orange juice (F) Strawberries (F) Coleslaw (V)	3	1	no	No. While the meal includes 1 cup of F and ¾ cup of V, it contains only one full component (F). The ½ cup of orange juice and ½ cup of strawberries together provide the full 1-cup portion of F. The full 1-cup serving of V includes both ¼ cup of tomato sauce and ¾ cup of coleslaw.
Cheeseburger (1 ½ ounces of cooked beef, ½ ounce of cheese) on whole-grain bun Carrot sticks (1 cup) Sliced apples (½ cup) Grapes (½ cup) Choice of low-fat (1%) unflavored milk or fat-free unflavored or flavored milk (1 cup)	Meat/Meat Alternate (M/MA), 2 ounce equivalents Grains (G), 2 ounce equivalents Vegetables (V), 1 cup Fruits (F), 1 cup Milk (M), 1 cup	Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G) Low-fat milk (M)	2	3	no	No. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, G and M) but is missing ½ cup of F or V.
		Cheeseburger without bun (M/MA) Carrot sticks (V) Low-fat milk (M)	3	2	yes	Yes. The meal contains three full components (M/MA, V and M) and includes 1 cup of V.
		Grapes (F) Carrot sticks (V) Low-fat milk (M)	3	2	yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (V and M) and ½ cup of F.
		Carrot sticks (V) Sliced apples (F) Fat-free milk (M)	3	2	yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (V and M) and ½ cup of F.
		Bun (G) Sliced apples (F) Fat-free milk (M)	3	3	yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (G and M) and includes ½ cup of F.
		Cheeseburger on bun (M/MA, G) Grapes (F)	3	3	yes	Yes. The meal contains two full components (M/MA and G) and includes ½ cup of F.
* A food item is a specific food offered within the five food components and may contain one or more food components or more than one serving of a single component. For example, an entree could provide one serving of grains and one serving of meat/meat alternates and a bagel could provide two servings of grains. ** A food component is one of the five food groups that comprise the reimbursable lunch including milk, fruits, vegetables, grains and meat/meat alternates.						

For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals](#) or contact the [school nutrition programs](#) staff in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457.

In accordance with federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call toll free 866-632-9992 (Voice). Individuals who are hearing impaired or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339 or 800-845-6136 (Spanish). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



The State of Connecticut Department of Education is committed to a policy of equal opportunity/affirmative action for all qualified persons. The Department of Education does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race, color, religious creed, sex, age, national origin, ancestry, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability (including, but not limited to, intellectual disability, past or present history of mental disorder, physical disability or learning disability), genetic information, or any other basis prohibited by Connecticut state and/or federal nondiscrimination laws. The Department of Education does not unlawfully discriminate in employment and licensing against qualified persons with a prior criminal conviction. Inquiries regarding the Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to: Lery Gillespie, Equal Employment Opportunity Director/Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator, State of Connecticut Department of Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457, 860-807-2101, Lery.Gillespie@ct.gov.