

Offer Versus Serve

Students in grades K-12 have the opportunity to choose only those foods which they intend to eat in the School Breakfast/Lunch Program. This section of the National School Food Program is designed to reduce food waste and give students the opportunity to select the foods which they want to eat.

The Basics for Lunch

The meal pattern for lunches consists of five food components:

- (1) Fruits
- (2) Vegetables
- (3) Grains
- (4) Meats/meat alternates (m/ma) and
- (5) Fluid milk.

The age/grade groups for lunches are:

- K-5
- 6-8
- 9-12

Under OVS (Offer versus Serve), all students, at any grade level, must select:

- At least 3 of 5 food components **AND**
- One of the choices selected must be at least a ½ cup serving of the fruit or vegetable component or a ½ cup total serving of both fruit and vegetable. If ½ cup of fruit is selected, the student must select the full required daily serving of the vegetable component for it to be counted as meeting that component.

Three food components are required for an adequate nutritious meal for students and to warrant the Federal reimbursement. Within each component, different choices may be offered, giving students and many combinations for building a reimbursable meal. Example 1 below shows a typical menu that allows for choices that may be selected by students for a reimbursable lunch.

EXAMPLE 1

Menu for Grades 9-12:

Choose 1: hamburger on bun OR turkey sandwich (2 ounce equivalents of grains and 2 ounce equivalents of m/ma each)

Choose up to 2: seasoned corn, green beans, potato wedges (1/2 cup vegetables each)*

Choose up to 2: orange slices, fruit cocktail, banana, apple juice (1/2 cup fruit each)*

Choose 1: nonfat unflavored milk OR nonfat flavored milk (1 cup milk each)

* Two ½ cups of a fruit and of a vegetable cannot be credited as two components if the student only selects three components total. One or the other must be a full cup to count both as components.

In Example 1, the menu planner offered the daily required minimum amount for the fruit and vegetable components. The student is able to decline some of the offerings as long as at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable is selected. In this example, the following combinations are reimbursable under OVS: ½ cup of orange slices and the turkey sandwich entrée; ½ cup of green beans, the banana and orange slices (counts as the fruit component since the full required daily serving was selected) and milk; and the hamburger and potato wedges. However, if the student selects the corn, fruit cocktail and milk, the meal is not reimbursable. S/he must select an additional ½ cup of either a fruit or vegetable or an entrée to consider that lunch reimbursable. Signage and instructions to students are important to assist them in understanding which foods may be declined under OVS. For examples of signage, check out the school meals Best Practices Sharing Center. (<http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/best-practices>)

Other than selecting the required minimum fruit or vegetable serving, it is the student's choice to select or decline a food component. Schools may not specify other food components a student must select. However, if the lunch menu includes, for example, a combination food such as a slice of pizza that provides three of the five required food components (grains from the crust; vegetables from the sauce and toppings; and m/ma from the cheese), the student may have to select the slice of pizza if not enough additional options are available to select a reimbursable lunch.

Five food components must be offered in at least the daily minimum required quantities and weekly minimum quantities, if applicable. However, OVS only applies to daily selections, not available choices over the school week.

The Basics for Breakfast

The meal pattern for breakfast consists of three food components:

- (1) Fruits (or vegetables substitution)
- (2) Grains (or optional credited meats/meat alternates)
- (3) Milk

The age/grade groups for breakfasts are:

- K-5
- 6-8
- 9-12

For OVS:

- At least four food items must be offered;
- All students, at any grade level, must select at least three food items;

- For grains (or meat/meat alternate offered for this component) and milk, the student must select the daily minimum required amount; and
- For the fruit component, the student must select at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetables

For example, the school may offer 1 oz eq cereal; ½ cup of juice, ½ cup of berries and 8 ounces of milk as the four food items. Under OVS, the student could select cereal, milk, and ½ cup of juice for a reimbursable breakfast.

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