



MEAL PATTERNS & NUTRITION STANDARDS

in the **NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM**

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) and operated by public schools, charter schools, nonprofit private schools, and residential child care institutions (RCCIs). The NSLP provides nutritionally balanced, economically priced, and free lunch to students each day. Contracting entities (CEs) that choose to participate in the NSLP receive reimbursement from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each lunch they serve. In return, CEs must serve lunches that meet the meal pattern requirements and offer free or reduced-priced meals to eligible students.

Key Terms

CE —Contracting Entity (organization that contracts with TDA to administer school meal programs)	M/MA —Meat/Meat Alternates
F —Fruits	NSLP —National School Lunch Program
FBMP —Food-Based Menu Planning	OVS —Offer versus Serve
Food Component —One of five food groups that make up a reimbursable meal	SBP —School Breakfast Program
Food Item —A specific food offered within the five food components	TDA —Texas Department of Agriculture
G —Grains	USDA —United States Department of Agriculture
HHFKA —Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act (2010)	V —Vegetables

Meal Pattern Components

The meal pattern is food-based and consists of five components:

- ◆ **Fruits**
- ◆ **Vegetables**
- ◆ **Grains**
- ◆ **Meat/Meat Alternates**
- ◆ **Milk**

Meal Pattern Age/Grade Groups

The meal pattern is divided into four age/grade groups:

- ◆ **Prekindergarten students (ages 3–4)***
- ◆ **Grades K–5 (ages 5–10)**
- ◆ **Grades 6–8 (ages 11–13)**
- ◆ **Grades 9–12 (ages 14–18)**

****Flexibility for Comingled Age/Grade Groups**—USDA allows flexibility in the pre-K meal pattern for CEs that are serving meals to pre-K students in the same service area and at the same time as older age/grade groups.*

Lunch Meal Pattern

Meal Pattern Component	Amount of Food ^a per Week (Minimum per Day)			
	Pre-K	Grades K–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
Fruits (cups)^b	($\frac{1}{4}$) ^{j, k}	2½ ($\frac{1}{2}$)	2½ ($\frac{1}{2}$)	5 (1)
Vegetables (cups)^b	($\frac{1}{4}$) ^j	3¾ ($\frac{3}{4}$)	3¾ ($\frac{3}{4}$)	5 (1)
Dark Green ^c	No vegetable subgroup requirements for this age/grade group.	½	½	½
Red/Orange ^c		¾	¾	1¼
Beans/Peas (Legumes) ^c		½	½	½
Starchy ^c		½	½	½
Other ^{c, d}		½	½	¾
Additional Vegetables to Reach Total ^e		1	1	1½
Grains Min. (oz. eq.)^f	(0.5 oz) ^l	8 (1)	8 (1)	10 (2)
Meat/Meat Alternates Min. (oz. eq.)	(1.5 oz) ^m	8 (1)	9 (1)	10 (2)
Fluid Milk (cups)^g	(¾) ⁿ	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)
Other Specifications: Daily Amount Based on the Average for a 5-Day Week				
Min.–Max. Calories (kcal)^{h, i}	No Dietary Specification requirements for this age/grade group	550–650	600–700	750–850
Saturated Fat (% of total calories)ⁱ		< 10	< 10	< 10
Sodium (mg.)ⁱ		≤ 1230	≤ 1360	≤ 1420
Trans fatⁱ		Nutrition label or manufacturer specification must indicate 0 grams of <u>trans</u> fat per serving.		

- a.** Food items and amount equivalents included in each food group and subgroup. Minimum creditable serving is $\frac{1}{8}$ cup.
- b.** One-quarter cup of dried fruit counts as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit; 1 cup of leafy greens counts as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of vegetables. No more than half of the fruit or vegetable offerings may be in the form of juice. All juice must be 100% full strength.
- c.** Larger amounts of these vegetables may be served.
- d.** This category consists of *Other Vegetables* as defined in regulations. The *Other Vegetables* requirement may be met with any additional amounts from the dark green, red/orange, and beans/peas (legumes) subgroups.
- e.** Any vegetable subgroup may be offered to meet the total weekly vegetable requirement.
- f.** All grains must be whole grain-rich in both the NSLP and the SBP.
- g.** Fluid milk must be low fat (1% milk fat or less, unflavored or flavored) or fat free (unflavored or flavored).
- h.** The average daily amount of calories for a 5-day school week must be within the allotted range (at least the minimum and no more than the maximum values).
- i.** Discretionary sources of calories (solid fats and added sugars) may be added to the meal pattern if within the specifications for calories, saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium. Foods of minimal nutritional value and fluid milk with fat content greater than 1% milk fat are not allowed.
- j.** A vegetable may be used to meet the entire fruit requirement. When two vegetables are served at lunch, two different kinds of vegetables must be served.
- k.** Juice must be full strength (100% juice) and may be used to meet the vegetable or fruit requirement at one meal per day, including snack.
- l.** At least one serving per day, across all meals served, must be whole grain-rich unless a meat/meat alternate is being served in place of grain that day. Grain-based desserts are not creditable.
- m.** Yogurt must contain no more than 23 grams of total sugars per 6-ounce serving. Any combination of peanuts, soy nuts, tree nuts, or seeds may be credited to meet 50% of the minimum amount to be served.
- n.** Milk must be 1 percent or less, low fat or fat free, and unflavored, and students are not given a choice of milk.

<u>Age/Grade Groups</u>	<u>Min.–Max. Calories (kcal)</u>
K–5 (Ages 5–10)	550–650
6–8 (Ages 11–13)	600–700
9–12 (Ages 14–18)	750–850
<i>The same age/grade groups are established for both NSLP and SBP.</i>	

K–5 AND 6–8 Lunch ★ Overlapping Age/Grade Groups ★

- ◆ A single menu can meet both patterns.
- ◆ Menu planners must meet the following:
 - ◆ Minimum 8 oz. eq. grains per week
 - ◆ Minimum 9 oz. eq. meat/meat alternates per week
 - ◆ Average daily calorie range 600–650

6–8 AND 9–12 Lunch ★ Nonoverlapping Menus for Age/Grade Groups ★

- ◆ There is **NO** overlap in grades 6–8 and 9–12 LUNCH meal patterns.
- ◆ CEs that serve both age/grade groups must develop menus to meet the requirements of these two separate groups.

Lunch Requirements

- ◆ CEs are required to identify what food items are required for a reimbursable meal near or at the beginning of the serving line.
- ◆ Potable water must be provided at no charge during meal service where reimbursable meals are served (including cafeterias, classrooms, courtyards, auditoriums, etc.).

FRUITS			
Lunch Meal Pattern			
	Grades K–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
Meal Pattern	Amount of Food per Week (Minimum per Day)		
Fruits (cups)	2½ (½)	2½ (½)	5 (1)

- ◆ If a campus is not implementing OVS, students must take the minimum daily requirement for the corresponding age/grade group.
- ◆ Fruit selections include fresh, frozen (with or without added sugar), 100% fruit juice, canned in juice/light syrup, or dried fruit options.
- ◆ Full-strength fruit juice may not be used to meet more than one-half of the fruit requirements over the course of the week.
- ◆ ¼ cup of dried fruit = ½ cup of fruit
- ◆ Refer to the Food Buying Guide for crediting.

VEGETABLES
Lunch Meal Pattern

	Grades K–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
Meal Pattern	Amount of Food per Week (Minimum per Day)		
Vegetables (cups)	3¾ (¾)	3¾ (¾)	5 (1)
◆ Dark Green	½	½	½
◆ Red/ Orange	¾	¾	1¼
◆ Beans/Peas (Legumes)	½	½	½
◆ Starchy	½	½	½
◆ Other	½	½	¾
◆ Additional Vegetables to Reach Total	1	1	1½

CEs with multiple serving lines with different menu items must offer all the vegetable subgroups each week on each serving line. This strategy ensures that all students have access to all of the vegetable subgroups throughout the week regardless of the serving line selected by the student.

If a school sets up serving stations where a student is able to go to several different places to select different components of the meal (e.g., first goes to a salad bar, then goes to a pasta station) before passing the point of service, then all of the stations as a whole must meet the daily component and weekly vegetable subgroup requirement.

- ◆ Daily minimum servings based on the quantities for each age/grade group
- ◆ $\frac{1}{8}$ cup minimum creditable amount
- ◆ Full-strength vegetable juice may not be used to meet more than one-half of the vegetable requirements over the course of the week.

Vegetable subgroups with **weekly** requirements:

- ◆ Dark Green (e.g., *broccoli, dark green leafy lettuce, romaine lettuce, turnip greens*)
- ◆ Red/Orange (e.g., *carrots, red peppers, sweet potatoes, tomatoes*)
- ◆ Beans/Peas (Legumes) (e.g., *black beans, kidney beans, pinto beans, white beans*)
- ◆ Starchy (e.g., *corn, green peas, potatoes*)
- ◆ Other (e.g., *bean sprouts, green cabbage, cauliflower, celery, cucumbers, green or wax beans, green peppers, head or iceberg lettuce, mushrooms, onions, summer squash, zucchini*)
- ◆ Additional vegetables to reach weekly total may come from any vegetable subgroup.

Crediting of leafy greens:

- ◆ 1 cup leafy green vegetable credits as $\frac{1}{2}$ cup vegetable.

GRAINS Lunch Meal Pattern			
	Grades K–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
Meal Pattern	Amount of Food per Week (Minimum per Day)		
Grains Min. (oz. eq.)	8 (1)	8 (1)	10 (2)

- ◆ Grains are a daily requirement in the NSLP, and all grain offerings must be whole grain-rich products.
- ◆ Quantities of grains in the meal patterns for the NSLP must be credited based on per oz. eq. standards using Exhibit A (Whole Grain-Rich Oz. Eq. Chart).
- ◆ Menus are to be planned so that the sum of all daily offerings meets at least the weekly minimum requirements.

Whole Grain-Rich Product Exemption:

A CE may request flexibility in serving specific whole grain-rich (WGR) products if the CE can demonstrate a hardship in procuring (buying or purchasing), preparing, or serving compliant WGR products that are accepted by students. To request an exemption, a CE must submit the *Whole Grain-Rich Exemption Request Form* to TDA.

All grains offered at lunch during the week must be whole grain-rich.

Whole grain-rich foods must meet the serving size requirements in the current Grains Instruction (Exhibit A) **and** meet at least **one** of the following:

- ◆ Whole grains per serving must be greater than or equal to 8 grams.
- ◆ Product includes FDA's whole-grain health claim on its packaging.
- ◆ Product ingredient listing lists whole grain first.

Grains may also be classified as whole grain-rich if they meet the following criteria:

- ◆ At least 50% of grain by weight is whole grain and the remaining grains are enriched
- ◆ If the first ingredient is water and a whole grain is listed as the second ingredient
- ◆ If the whole grain is the primary grain ingredient by weight in mixed-dish products

Grain-Based Desserts:

- ◆ Only 2 oz. eq. of creditable grain-based desserts allowed at lunch per school week.
- ◆ Animal crackers, graham crackers, granola bars, and breakfast bars are considered grain-based desserts at lunch.

MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATES			
Lunch Meal Pattern			
	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Meal Pattern	Amount of Food per Week (Minimum per Day)		
Meat/Meat Alternates Min. (oz. eq.)	8 (1)	9 (1)	10 (2)

- ◆ CEs must offer meat/meat alternates daily as part of the lunch meal.
- ◆ The quantity of meat/meat alternate must be the edible portion served.
- ◆ To be counted in meeting this requirement, the meat/meat alternates must be served in a main dish or in a main dish and one other menu item.
- ◆ A variety of meat/meat alternates is encouraged.

MILK Lunch Meal Pattern			
	Grades K–5	Grades 6–8	Grades 9–12
Meal Pattern	Amount of Food per Week (Minimum per Day)		
Fluid milk (cups)	5 (1)	5 (1)	5 (1)

Allowable milk options:

- ◆ Fat free (unflavored or flavored)
- ◆ 1% low fat (unflavored or flavored)
- ◆ Fat free or low fat (lactose reduced or lactose free)

All milk served must be fluid types of milk that are pasteurized and meet state and local standards for milk. No matter what type of meal service is used, every reimbursable meal must include a choice of milk.

What must be offered in NSLP?

5 Components

- ◆ Fruits
- ◆ Vegetables
- ◆ Grains
- ◆ Meat/Meat Alternates
- ◆ Milk



Offer versus Serve (OVS)

The system is designed to

- ◆ reduce plate waste,
- ◆ lower food costs, and
- ◆ give students greater flexibility with choices.

OVS must be implemented for lunch offered to students in grades 9–12 (High School). In order for the meal to be reimbursable, students must take at least

- ◆ 3 of 5 components and
- ◆ ½ cup serving of fruit or vegetable.

Key Factors in Menu Planning

- ◆ **Emphasize** variety and choice
- ◆ **Repeat** exposure to less familiar foods
- ◆ **Maintain** visual appeal

Nutrition Goals

Menu planning is designed to meet specified nutrient levels for the various age/grade groups. The food-based menu planning system sets minimum daily and weekly amounts, and in some cases recommended maximum offerings, for each of the five food components. Calorie ranges and limits on sodium and saturated and trans fats are established for each of the three age/grade groups. The menu planner establishes what the entrees are and the serving sizes of the menu items.

Child Nutrition Labels

The Child Nutrition (CN) labeling program is a voluntary federal labeling program that identifies the meal pattern contribution of the product(s) toward the meal pattern requirements. It is based on data from the Food Buying Guide and ensures that foods are nutritionally equivalent.

A CN label does not mean that it is “good” or that the product meets the dietary guidelines. There is no requirement to purchase CN-labeled products; however, the use of CN labels will help ensure the accuracy of contributions to the meal plan components.

The CN label must include the following:

- ◆ CN logo
- ◆ 6-digit product ID number
- ◆ Statement of the product’s contribution
- ◆ Authorization statement
- ◆ Month and year the label was approved by FNS (must be within the last 5 years)



Nutrition Facts Labels

Nutrition Facts		
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)		
Serving Per Container 2		
Amount Per Serving		
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110	
	% Daily Value *	
Total Fat 12g		18%
Saturated Fat 3g		15%
Trans Fat 3g		
Cholesterol 30mg		10%
Sodium 470 mg		20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g		10%
Dietary Fiber 0g		0%
Sugars 5g		
Protein 5g		
Vitamin A		4%
Vitamin C		2%
Calcium		20%
Iron		4%
* Percent Daily Values are based on a diet of 2,000 calories. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.		
	Calories:	2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g 80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g 20g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g 375g
Dietary Fiber		25g 30g

- ◆ Provide nutritional breakdown of the food item or the processed product
- ◆ May be on product packaging
- ◆ Can be obtained from the product’s manufacturer if there is not a nutrition facts label on the package or product
- ◆ Are required at the time of an administrative review
- ◆ Do not state the contribution of the product toward the meal pattern
- ◆ Will provide verification of grams of trans fat

While Nutrition Facts labels are not required on products produced for institutional use, many of the items CEs purchase will carry this information on the package.

Ingredient Labels

- ◆ Identify the ingredients in a food item
- ◆ Can be found on the packaging of all manufactured items
- ◆ Are needed on grain items to indicate whole-grain products and to document the serving size; refer to specific guidance on grains in the grains section of this booklet
- ◆ Do not state contribution toward the meal pattern or nutrient content

Whole-Grain Chicken Corn Dog

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 4 oz (112g)	
Servings Per Case: 72	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 240	Calories from Fat 70
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 8g	12%
Saturated Fat 2g	10%
Trans Fat 0g	
Cholesterol 20mg	7%
Sodium 590mg	25%
Total Carbohydrate 33g	11%
Dietary Fiber 5g	20%
Sugars 9g	
Proteins 9g	18%
Calcium	15%
Iron	15%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:	
	Calories: 2,000 2,500
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Saturated Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g



Batter Ingredients:

Water, whole wheat flour, whole grain corn, vegetable oil, sugar, contains 2% or less of leavening (sodium acid pyrophosphate, sodium bicarbonate), salt, ascorbic acid, egg white, dried honey, artificial flavor.

Chicken Frank Ingredients:

Mechanically separated chicken, water, corn syrup solids, contains less than 2% of spices, salt, sodium phosphate, potassium chloride, flavorings, sodium diacetate, sodium erythorbate, sodium nitrite. Contains: Wheat

Notes

RESOURCES

Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs

<https://foodbuyingguide.fns.usda.gov>

TDA NSLP Policy & Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)

(Reference ARM for periodic updates)

http://squaremeals.org/Portals/8/files/ARM/ARM_Section9_Lunch_V003_170628.pdf

USDA Nutrition Standards for School Meals

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/nutrition-standards-school-meals>

USDA Website

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp>



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Region ⁴
Child
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*To enhance compliance, efficiency, and quality in
delivering healthy school meals.*

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