

OFFER VERSUS SERVE (OVS)

Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers



School Breakfast Program

What is OVS?

The goal of OVS is to reduce food waste while allowing students to choose the foods they want to eat. Everyone plays a role. When students and cafeteria staff understand OVS, breakfast lines move smoothly, allowing students to make the most of meal time and enjoy the wholesome and appealing foods they are served. It also helps reduce overall food costs.

Under OVS at breakfast, schools must offer at least four food items from the three required food components (fruit, grains, and fluid milk*).

- A **food component** is one of three required food groups in a reimbursable breakfast. These are fruits, grains, and fluid milk*.
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the three food components, for example, 2 slices of whole grain-rich bread, 1 cup of grapes, and 1 cup of milk. This meal meets OVS breakfast requirements because three food components and four food items are offered.

Students must select at least three of the four offered food items under OVS at breakfast, including at least ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable. Please note, OVS is optional at breakfast for all grade levels.

Required Components at Breakfast



Fruit

1 cup



Grains

1 ounce equivalent
(oz eq)



Fluid Milk*

1 cup

Sample OVS breakfast menu:

Variety of milk*: fat free or low-fat (1 cup milk)
Slice of whole grain-rich toast (1 oz eq grain)
Whole grain-rich cereal (1 oz eq grain)
Orange slices (1 cup fruit)

Optional Components at Breakfast

Vegetables

- Vegetables may be offered as a substitute for fruits.

Meats/Meat Alternates

- A meat/meat alternate may be served to meet the weekly grain requirement, as long as a 1 oz eq minimum of grains is offered daily.
- A meat/meat alternate may also be offered as an “extra” food (not credited toward meal pattern requirements) if a reimbursable meal is selected.

*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

Is it Reimbursable?

For a breakfast to be reimbursable, at least four food items must be offered. Students must select three food items including ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable for the meal to be reimbursable under OVS.

Use this simple checklist to determine if breakfasts are reimbursable under OVS:

- ☒ Does the meal offered consist of at least four food items?
- ☒ Does the meal offered include the minimum required amounts of fruits, grains, and milk*?
- ☒ Does the meal selected by the student contain at least three food items, including at least ½ cup fruit and/or vegetable?



If the answer to each of these questions is yes, the breakfast meal is reimbursable under OVS.

*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

Additional Tips for OVS Success

- Post signage (with pictures or graphics) near the beginning of each serving line to help students identify how to build a reimbursable meal and wherever student choices are made.
- Ask cashiers to review the reimbursable meal signage before each meal service.
- Keep fruit near the cashier stand so students can easily complete their reimbursable meal.
- Encourage teachers to review the day's menu with students and explain how students can select a reimbursable meal.
- Post menus that highlight required meal components on your school's website and/or on flyers that children can take home to discuss with their parents and caregivers.

For more information on OVS requirements, visit:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16>

OFFER VERSUS SERVE (OVS)

Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers



National School Lunch Program

What is OVS?

The goal of OVS is to reduce food waste and allow students to choose the foods they want to eat. Everyone plays a role. When students and cafeteria staff understand OVS, lunch lines move smoothly, allowing students to make the most of the lunch break and enjoy the wholesome and appealing foods they are served. It also helps reduce overall food costs.

Schools must offer all five food components in at least the minimum required quantities:

- A **food component** is one of five required food groups in reimbursable lunches. These are meats/meat alternates, grains, fruits, vegetables, and fluid milk*.
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the five food components. For example, spaghetti (whole grain-rich pasta with tomato sauce) is one food item that contains a grain and a vegetable component.

Under OVS, students must select *three meal components* to ensure they get the nutritional benefits of a meal. OVS is required for lunches served in high schools, but is optional in middle and elementary schools. OVS is not required for meals offered as part of field trips or for any other meals served away from the school campus.

The required five food components must be offered for school lunch. Students must select at least three of the five required food components, including at least ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable, to have a reimbursable lunch. See the **Required Food Components** table for a listing of required food components and their minimum quantities that must be offered. Meats/meat alternates and grains are measured in ounce equivalents (oz eq) is considered the amount of food product that is equal to 1 ounce).

Required Food Components

| Required Food 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 |

Is it Reimbursable?

Use this simple checklist to determine if student lunches are reimbursable under OVS:

- ☒ Does the meal offered to students include the minimum required amounts of vegetables, fruits, grains, meats/meat alternates, and fluid milk?
- ☒ Does the meal selected by the student contain at least three components, including at least ½ cup fruit and/or vegetable?

If the answer to each of these questions is yes, then the school lunch is reimbursable under OVS.

*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

Test Your OVS Skills!

Which combination of food items from the following offered lunch menu would make a reimbursable school lunch under OVS for Grades 9-12?

Offered Lunch Menu

| Food Item | Food Components |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Hamburger on a whole grain-rich bun | 2 oz eq grain 2 oz eq meat |
| ½ cup corn | ½ cup starchy vegetable |
| ½ cup green beans | ½ cup other vegetable |
| 1 cup grapes | 1 cup fruit |
| Variety of Low Fat/ Fat-Free Milk | 1 cup fluid milk* |

oz eq = ounce equivalent



Which of the following student meals are reimbursable?

Meal 1:

½ cup of corn
½ cup of green beans
½ cup of grapes
1 cup of milk*



- ☐ Reimbursable
☐ Not Reimbursable

Meal 2:

Hamburger on whole grain-rich bun
1 cup of milk*



- ☐ Reimbursable
☐ Not Reimbursable

Meal 3:

Hamburger on whole grain-rich bun
½ cup corn



- ☐ Reimbursable
☐ Not Reimbursable

Answers: Meals 1 and 3 are reimbursable meals under OVS. Meal 2 is not reimbursable because it does not include ½ cup fruit and/or vegetable.

*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

Additional Tips for OVS Success

- Post signage with pictures to help students identify how to build a reimbursable meal near the beginning of each serving line and wherever student choices are made.
- Have cashiers review the reimbursable meal signage before each meal service for greater success.
- Keep fruit near the cashier stand so students can easily complete their reimbursable meal.
- Encourage teachers to review the day's menu with students and explain how students can select a reimbursable meal.
- Post menus that highlight required meal components on your school's website and/or on flyers that children can take home to discuss with their parents and caregivers.

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