

Offer Versus Serve

Overview

Offer Versus Serve (OVS) is a menu planning and meal service concept for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) with the goal of increasing food consumption and reducing waste. OVS allows students to decline some of the food offered in order to choose the foods they want to eat.

OVS sets requirements for the food components that schools **must offer** during a meal and the minimal number of items or components a student **must take** for a reimbursable meal. SBP and NSLP have different OVS requirements as indicated by the following:

- *School Breakfast Program (SBP):*
 - Schools must offer three food components: fruit (or vegetable), grain, & fluid milk in creditable portion sizes in a minimum of four food items.
 - Students must take a minimum of three food items, including at least ½ cup of the fruit (or vegetable) offering.

- *National School Lunch Program (NSLP):*
 - Schools must offer five food components: fruit, vegetable, grain, meat/meat alternate, & fluid milk in at least the daily minimum required amounts for the age-grade group.
 - Students must take at least three of the five food components in the required serving, including at least ½ cup of a fruit and/or vegetable.

Offering a variety of choices within food components is different from OVS. It is up to the menu planner to indicate what combination of choices must be selected for a reimbursable meal.

OVS is optional for all age-grade groups in the SBP as well as optional for age-grade groups K-8 in the NSLP; however, OVS is mandatory for grades 9-12 in the NSLP. OVS is also optional for lunches consumed off site (field trips) as well as for school food authorities (SFAs) providing meals through the at-risk afterschool meals component of the Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP) and summer meals offered by SFAs through Summer Food Service Program. OVS cannot be used for snacks in any program.

Terminology

Food component (meal component) - One of the required food groups that comprise a reimbursable meal: meats/meat alternate (m/ma); grain; fruit; vegetable; and fluid milk. Schools must offer the specified food components in at least the minimum required quantities. The menu planner decides how to count (credit) certain foods that have more than one component option (e.g., legumes may count as either a m/ma or as a vegetable).

Food item - A specific food offered within the three food components required at breakfast. Depending on the planned menu, the student may need to select more than one food item to have the minimum quantity needed for a component to be credited. The menu planner decides how to count/credit food items.

Offer versus serve (OVS) - A menu planning and meal service concept that allows students to decline some of the food offered in a reimbursable lunch or breakfast while permitting students to choose the foods they want while reducing food waste. OVS is optional at breakfast for all age-grade groups. OVS is optional at lunch for grades K-5 and 6-8, but is required for senior high school grades 9-12. For identifying a reimbursable meal under OVS, food components are counted at lunch, whereas food items are counted at breakfast.

Point-of-service (POS) - Food service operation point where determination of a reimbursable meal served to free, reduced-price, or paid lunch eligible students is made.

Reimbursable meal - A meal that has met all of the mandatory federal meal requirements and can be claimed to receive reimbursement.

Whole grain-rich (WGR) – Whole grain-rich products must contain at least 50 percent whole grains, and the remaining grain, if any, must be enriched. To qualify as WGR, the item must: meet portion size requirements for the grains component; have at least 50 percent of the grains in the product as whole grains; have all the grains in the product be whole or enriched; have whole grain as the primary ingredient by weight (non-mixed dishes) or as the primary *grain* ingredient by weight (mixed dishes). For further information, see the Whole Grain Resource link listed under Resources.

What is Offer Versus Serve?

OVS sets requirements for the food components that schools must offer during a meal and the minimal number of items or components a student must take for a reimbursable meal. OVS reduces food costs by limiting the amount of food waste by allowing students to select preferred food items or components and to decline some options.

School Breakfast Program (SBP)

- OVS is optional at breakfast for all age-grade groups.
- Schools must offer or menu at least four (4) food items in the creditable portion sizes from three (3) food components. The three required breakfast food components are:
 - Fruit/Vegetable, 1 cup (vegetables may substitute as fruit)
 - Grain, 1 oz eq
 - Fluid Milk, 1 cup/8 fluid oz
- One of the three (3) food items selected must be at least ½ cup fruit; or ½ cup vegetable; or ¼ cup fruit plus ¼ cup vegetable.
 - Schools may substitute vegetables in place of fruit. In order for a starchy vegetable (e.g., hash browns) to be offered in place of the fruit component, two

cups per week of any such substitution must be from the following non-starchy subgroups: dark green, red/orange, beans/peas, or other vegetables. Find a link to a list of vegetable subgroups under Additional Resources.

- If a starchy vegetable, such as hash browns, is to be served during a week without having met the requirement of having planned to offer 2 cups of non-starchy vegetables that week, then the starchy vegetable may be offered as an “extra” as long as fruit is served to meet the fruit component requirement. The “extra” is counted in the nutrient analysis in regards to the dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium. “Extra” food does not credit toward meeting USDA meal requirements.
- Students must select at least three (3) food items in the daily minimum required amount, including at least ½ cup of fruit.
- A grain selection counts as one item if it equals at least the 1 oz equivalent minimum daily requirement.
 - A m/ma can substitute as a grain **if** the minimum daily whole grain-rich grain component requirement has been met. In this way, a m/ma may count toward the *weekly* grain requirement if it fits within dietary specifications.
 - Alternatively, a m/ma may be offered as an “extra”. The “extra” is counted in the nutrient analysis in regards to the dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium. “Extra” food does not credit toward meeting USDA meal requirements.
- The menu planner decides how to count items:
 - Double portions can count as two items. For example, two pieces of 1 oz toast can count as two items.
 - Large portions can count as more than one item. For example, a 2 oz eq muffin can count as either one or two items.
 - Combination food can count as one or more items. For example, a breakfast sandwich may provide 1 oz eq grain and 1 oz eq m/ma:
 - The 1 oz eq grain may count as one item and the 1 oz eq m/ma may count as one item (a grain), therefore the breakfast sandwich selection may count as two items. Furthermore, using this menu planning, a m/ma may count toward the *weekly* grain requirement (note: average weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium must be followed).
 - The 1 oz eq grain may count as one item while the 1 oz eq m/ma may count as an “extra”, therefore the breakfast sandwich selection may count as one item (note: average weekly dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium must be followed).

- If OVS is not implemented at breakfast, schools must **serve** or menu three (3) food components in a minimum of three food items: fruit (or vegetable), grain, & fluid milk in creditable serving sizes.
- Fruit/vegetable, 1 cup
- Grain, 1 oz eq (m/ma may be provided after daily grain requirement is met)
- Fluid milk, 1 cup/8 fluid oz
- Additional allowable food may be served as long as the food is counted in the nutrient analysis in regards to the dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium dietary specifications.

National School Lunch Program (NSLP)

- OVS is mandatory at lunch for the senior high level and optional for K-8.
- Schools must offer or menu food items from all five (5) food components: m/ma, grain, fruit, vegetable, fluid milk in the amounts specified in the lunch meal pattern for the age-grade group.
 - Students must select at least three (3) different food components in the daily minimum required amounts.
 - Students must select at least ½ cup serving of fruit or vegetable or a combination of fruit and vegetable.

Fruit and Vegetable Requirements

Regardless of the age-grade group portion size that must be available, OVS requires students to select at least a ½ cup of either the fruit or the vegetable component, or a ½ cup combination of both components (e.g., ¼ cup fruit and ¼ cup vegetable) for a reimbursable meal. In the case where a student selects both a fruit and a vegetable as two of three components selected, then the student may choose to select the ½ cup minimum of either the fruit or the vegetable, but must take the full age-grade group required portion size of the other (vegetable or fruit) component.

Salad Bars

Salad bars are still subject to OVS requirements. Foods may be pre-portioned to ensure that students take the minimum required portion sizes from a salad bar so that food service staff can quickly identify a reimbursable meal. If food is not pre-portioned, then food service staff must be trained to accurately identify the required portion sizes of self-serve items.

“Extras”

Food(s) noted on the menu as “extra” do not count toward meeting the minimum required meal components nor do they count as breakfast food items. If a student selected an “extra” at breakfast, they would still need to have three other breakfast items, including at least ½ cup of fruit, on the breakfast tray for a reimbursable meal. In the SBP, meat/meat alternates may count as a grain component *or* may count as an “extra”. In the SBP, vegetables can either substitute as the fruit component or be an “extra”. It is up to the menu planner to decide how

items should credit. The “extra” is counted in the nutrient analysis in regards to the dietary specifications for calories, saturated fat, and sodium, but the “extra” is **not** creditable toward meeting USDA meal requirements.

Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

Non-school and school sponsors participating in SFSP that choose to follow the SFSP meal pattern are required to use OVS, however the requirements in SFSP are different from the OVS requirements in NSLP. School sponsors that chose to use the NSLP or SBP meal pattern are required to follow the OVS requirements of NSLP and SBP.

Cafeteria Style Meal Service / Family Style Meal Service

When meals are prepared and served by schools for CACFP in the At Risk Afterschool Meal Program, the schools have the option of following the NSLP *or* the CACFP meal pattern. If the school chooses the NSLP meal pattern, the use of OVS is permitted. If they choose the CACFP meal pattern, OVS is not permitted. In this case, the schools may use either cafeteria style meal service or family style meal service. In cafeteria style meal service, all meal components must be served to the participant in the cafeteria line. In family style meal service: all components must be available and the participants serve themselves; the participant must be seated at the table and has the option of how much and even if they select an item(s); an adult mentor models healthy nutrition habits and encourages the introduction of new foods to the children.

Why is Offer Versus Serve Important?

Offering a variety of food choices to students increases the likelihood that students will select the food and beverages they prefer, which increases consumption and reduces waste. The menu planner must indicate what choices or combination of choices may be selected to have a reimbursable meal. It is important to recognize that offering a variety of choices within the food components is different from OVS. If multiple food items within a component are made available for selection, but the student is only allowed to select up to two of the food item choices, then only two food items are actually being “offered”. Students, servers, and cashiers must be able to identify what constitutes a reimbursable meal. Schools using OVS must also identify what a student must select in order to have a reimbursable meal (i.e., signage located in the cafeteria, preferably at or near the beginning of the serving line, explaining what constitutes a reimbursable meal to students, including the requirement to select at least ½ cup fruit or vegetable, accomplishes this).

When implementing OVS, menu planners must ensure that enough food components or food items are accounted for in order to meet meal pattern requirements while offering choices to students. Point-of-service staff must be able to recognize if enough components/items have been selected by the student to make a reimbursable meal.

Resources

Additional resources may be available for this topic. Please check the Idaho School Nutrition Reference Guide website for copies of manuals, user guides and helpful links to relevant subject matter.