

LUNCH MEAL PATTERN (SIX DAY WEEK)

Required Meal Components	Grades Pre-K Ages 3-5	Grades K-5		Grades 6-8		Grades K-8 ¹		Grades 9-12	
		Daily	Weekly	Daily	Weekly	Daily	Weekly	Daily	Weekly
Fruit (Cups)	1/4	1/2	3	1/2	3	1/2	3	1	6
Vegetables (Cups)	1/4	3/4	4.5	3/4	4.5	3/4	4.5	1	6
Dark Green	-		½		½		½		½
Red/Orange	-		¾		¾		¾		1 ¼
Beans, Peas, & Lentils	-		½		½		½		½
Starchy	-		½		½		½		½
Other	-		½		½		½		¾
Additional to reach total	-		1.75		1.75		1.75		2.5
Grains (oz. equivalents)	1/2	1	9.5-11 ²	1	9.5-12 ²	1	9.5-11 ²	2	12-14.5 ²
Meat/Meat Alternate (oz. equivalents)	1 ½	1	9.5-12 ²	1	11-12 ²	1	11-12 ²	2	12-14.5 ²
Fluid Milk ³ (Cups)	3/4	1	6	1	6	1	6	1	6

Required Dietary Specifications	Grades Pre-K Ages 3-5	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades K-8	Grades 9-12
Calorie Range (daily average)	-	550-650	600-700	600-650	750-850
Saturated Fat ³ (% of total calories)	-	<10	<10	<10	<10
Added Sugars Beginning SY 2027-2028	-	<10% of total calories per week	<10% of total calories per week	<10% of total calories per week	<10% of total calories per week
Sodium (mg) Target 1A Through June 30, 2027	-	≤1100 mg	≤1225 mg	≤1100 mg	≤1280 mg
Sodium (mg) Implemented by July 1, 2027	-	≤ 935 mg	≤ 1,035 mg	≤935 mg	≤ 1,080 mg

- The K-8 grouping is only for schools with grade configurations that prevent students from being separated into the required grade groups (K-5 and 6-8) at lunch. Examples include schools with grades K-8 or grades 5-8 where students from different grade groups eat together during the same lunch period. If students can be served separately in their appropriate grade groups, schools must use the required meal patterns for grades K-5 and 6-8.
- There is no maximum grain or meat/meat alternates requirement. Menus must meet the minimum requirements and stay within the calorie, saturated fat and sodium ranges.
- The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 modifies the saturated fat requirement to exclude fluid milk only from the weekly limit.

Additional Notes:

Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Preschool Meal Pattern:

Preschool students are required to follow the CACFP preschool meal pattern, however, the USDA allows flexibility for co-mingled students. Schools that serve meals to preschoolers and K-5 students in the same service area at the same time may choose to follow the grade-appropriate meal patterns for each grade group or serve the K-5 meal pattern to both grade groups.

- **Fruits/Vegetables:** A second, different vegetable may be served in place of fruit. There are no vegetable subgroup requirements. May serve 100% juice once per day. For example, if juice is served at breakfast, it cannot be served at lunch.
- **Grains:** One of the grain items must be whole grain-rich (WGR) every day. Enriched grains may be served at lunch if WGR items are served at breakfast. Grain based desserts may not be credited toward the grain component. Sweet crackers (graham and animal crackers) are allowable and can count toward the grain component (with no weekly limit).
- **Milk:** For 3–5-year-olds: unflavored low-fat (1%) or unflavored fat-free (skim) milk. Flavored milk is not creditable.

Added Sugars:

- **Breakfast cereals** must contain no more than 6 grams of added sugar per dry ounce.
- **Yogurt** must contain no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces.

K-12 Meal Pattern:

Meat/Meat Alternates:

- The serving size refers to the edible portion of cooked lean meat, poultry or fish served (i.e., cooked lean meat without bone).
- Meat/meat alternates must be served in a main dish or a main dish and one other food item.
- A 1-ounce equivalent (oz. eq.) serving equals: 1 oz. lean meat, poultry, fish or most cheeses, ¼ cup cooked beans/peas (lentils), ½ large egg, 2 Tbsp. nut butters, 1 oz. nuts or seeds, ½ cup yogurt or soy yogurt, ¼ cup commercial tofu containing at least 5 grams protein

Fruits:

- Fruit juice may only be offered to meet 50% of the weekly fruit component. Only 100% full strength pasteurized juice is allowed.
- Fruit includes fresh, frozen, canned in light syrup, water or juice and dried.
- All fruits credit based on volume, except dried fruit credits as twice the volume served (e.g., ¼ cup dried fruit credits as ½ cup fruit).
- Larger amounts of fruit may be offered if meals do not exceed the weekly limit for calories, saturated fat and sodium.

Vegetables:

- All vegetables credit based on volume except raw leafy greens, tomato puree and tomato paste.
 - Raw leafy greens credit as half the volume served (e.g., 1 cup romaine lettuce equals ½ cup vegetable).
 - Tomato puree and tomato paste credit using the whole food equivalency (volume of tomatoes prior to pureeing) rather than the actual volume served.
- Vegetable subgroup requirements are weekly; however, daily minimum vegetable requirements must be met. Refer to the USDA *Food Buying Guide* for Child Nutrition Programs for specific vegetables in each subgroup.

- The “other vegetables” requirement may be met with any additional amounts from the dark green, red/orange, and beans, peas and lentils vegetable subgroups.
- Any vegetable subgroup may be offered as “additional” vegetables to meet the total weekly vegetable requirement.
- Schools may count beans, peas and lentils offered as meat/meat alternates at lunch toward the weekly beans, peas and lentils vegetable subgroup requirements. When offering beans, peas, and lentils as meats/meat alternates, schools may only count those items toward one meal component daily: either the meat/meat alternates component or the vegetables component. When schools offer beans, peas, and lentils as meat alternates, they are still required to offer additional vegetables to meet the daily and weekly vegetable meal component requirements.

Grains:

- At least 80% of the grains served in school meals per week must be whole grain-rich (WGR) and the remaining grains served must be enriched. To meet USDA’s WGR criteria, a product must contain at least 50% whole grains, and the remaining grain content of the product must be enriched. If whole grain-rich or enriched products include non-creditable ingredients, the non-creditable grains must be less than 2% of the product formula by weight (or less than 0.25 oz. eq.) for the grain product to be creditable at lunch.
- Up to 2 oz. eq. per week may be a grain-based dessert if menus meet all dietary specifications.
- For more information, see USDA’s [Whole Grain Resource for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs](#).

Milk:

- At least two varieties must be offered daily from the choices listed below. Please note, one of the selections must be unflavored milk:
 - Fat free unflavored or flavored
 - Low fat (1%) unflavored or flavored
 - Reduced fat (2%) unflavored or flavored
 - Whole unflavored or flavored

Nutrient Standards:

- Nutrient standards are daily amounts based on the average for a five-day week.
- **Sodium:**
 - Maintain Target 1A Sodium Limits through SY 2026-2027
 - Beginning July 1, 2027, schools must implement the 15% reduction in sodium as listed above
- **Saturated fat:**
 - School lunches offered to all age/grade groups must, on average over the school week, provide less than 10 percent of total calories from saturated fat. Fluid milk is excluded from the weekly limit for saturated fat.
- **Added Sugars:**
 - **Breakfast Cereals** must not contain more than 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce
 - **Yogurt** must not contain more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces
 - **Flavored Milk** must not contain more than 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces/1 cup
- Beginning in the 2027-2028 School Year, added sugars must be less than 10% of calories per week. These weekly limits will be in addition to product-based limits.