USDA
United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

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.

For more information on OVS requirements, visit:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/updated-offer-vs-serve-guidance-nslp-and-sbp-beginning-sy2015-16

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