



Food Service

Nutritional Standards SY 24-25

The Basics

-School meals are healthy meals.

-To receive federal reimbursements for each meal they serve, school meal programs must offer “reimbursable” meals that meet strict federal nutrition standards, aligned with the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#).

-These standards, also referred to as “the meal pattern,” require schools to offer students the right balance of fruits, vegetables, low-fat or fat-free milk, whole grains and lean protein.

School Meal Standards

-In April 2024, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released long-term federal nutrition standards for school meals, updating rules established following passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA).

-New mandates include sugar limits and further sodium reductions to be phased in beginning in 2025.

New Meal Standards Coming in 2025

-Whole Grains Schools may continue to offer a variety of nutrient-rich whole grains with options for some enriched grains (no changes in standard)

-Milk Continue to allow flavored and unflavored milk (no changes in standard) with new limits on added sugars

-Added Sugars Limit using a phased approach: • Phase 1: Limits on specific high-sugar products (cereals, yogurt, flavored milk) • Phase 2: Overall weekly limits

National School Lunch Program Meal Pattern

- **All five food groups must be offered.** Students have the choice to take at least 3 items.

1- Fruit- Grades K-8- offered ½ cup per day, Grades 9-12- 1 cup per day

2- Vegetables- Five sub groups of different vegetables must be offered each week such as red/orange, dark green, legumes, etc. Grades K-8- offered 1 cup per day, Grades 9-12- 1 cup per day

3- Whole Grains- 80% of the weekly offerings must be whole grain rich. 2 oz per day are required for Grades K-12

National School Lunch Program Meal Pattern cont..

4- Lean Protein- 2 oz per meal are required for grades K-12. Chicken, lean beef, turkey, fish, hummus, nut spreads, and low fat dairy items all qualify as lean proteins and can be found on AW menus.

5- Fat Free Flavored milk or 1% White Milk are offered to each student. 8 oz per day for grades K-12.

Examples of Menu Items



Snack Standards

- To ensure all foods and beverages sold in school during the school day are healthy choices, HHFKA also required USDA to create nutrition standards for foods and beverages sold in competition to reimbursable meals.
- These “competitive foods” are sold in vending machines, snack bars and a la carte lines. USDA’s “Smart Snacks in School” standards took effect on July 1, 2014.
- All items have to be under 200 calories, low in sugar & fat, have whole grains. All bottled drinks must not include added sugars.

Why is the USDA updating the meal standards?

By law, USDA is required to develop school nutrition standards that reflect the goals of the most recent edition of the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#).

Most children are consuming too much added sugars and sodium and not enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, leading to a rise in diet-related diseases. By following the science and listening to extensive feedback from all our school meal partners, USDA is making gradual updates to the school nutrition standards in a few key areas to give children the right balance of many nutrients for healthy, tasty meals.