

Students, servers, and cashiers must be able to identify what constitutes a reimbursable meal. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) regulations at 7 CFR 210.10(a)(2) requires that schools identify, near or at the beginning of serving lines, what foods constitute unit priced reimbursable meals. Schools using Offer Versus Serve (OVS) must also identify what a student must select in order to have a reimbursable meal under OVS. Because of the School Year (SY) 2014-2015 changes to the SBP meal pattern and resulting changes to OVS, schools offering breakfasts must ensure that students and their parents are aware of the new requirements. In addition, SFAs and schools should highlight the SBP changes in materials, such as menus and newsletters, provided to parents or posted on websites.

Students and their parents need to be aware of what is included in school meals—parents, so they can reinforce nutrition education messages at home and students, so they know how to select a reimbursable meal. Signage and menus should provide clear information about allowable choices. This will help students easily build a reimbursable meal and is especially important to avoid problems at the point of service. Schools are encouraged to conduct training for cashiers and serving line staff so they can help students select the required food components/food items in the quantities needed for reimbursable lunches and breakfasts.

Signage is not required for field trips, breakfast in the classroom and other venues where signage may be problematic. However, other methods should be used to inform students what choices they have.

Offering Choices within Components is Not OVS

We continue to encourage schools to offer a variety of food choices to students; this increases the likelihood that students will select the foods and beverages they prefer, which increases consumption and reduces waste. However, it is important to recognize that offering a variety of choices within the food components is different from OVS.

If choices within components are offered, the menu planner must indicate to the students what choices or combination of choices the student may select to have a reimbursable meal. One common example for the SBP is cereal types. Offering four different types of cereal and instructing students to “select one” is not the same as offering four grain items. Because the student can only “select one,” only one grain item (cereal) is being offered to each student, even though the student can select from several cereal options.

Another useful example for the NSLP relates to the fruit or vegetable components. The menu planner may choose to offer a variety of fruit and would instruct the student to select a specific amount. If ½ cup portions of three different fruits are offered, the menu planner could indicate that the student may select “up to two” servings. This provides a variety of food choices to the student and shows the student how to select a reimbursable lunch. Although three different fruits are offered, since the student is instructed to select up to only two servings, only two fruit items are being “offered.”

Questions and Answers

1. How should the serving lines be set-up to assist students with making the correct choices for OVS at lunch?

Although all the foods that are a part of the reimbursable meal do not have to be adjacent to each other, they must be labeled, listed, or otherwise identified near or at the beginning of the service line so the students can easily choose all the food components/food items for a reimbursable meal. If some of the food components/food items offered in reimbursable meals (such as the fruits and vegetables) are offered beyond the point of service, the school must ensure that students are aware that every reimbursable meal must include at least $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of a fruit and/or vegetable.

2. Must the menu choices be offered at the point of service? For example, SFAs may use caterers or advance on-line ordering to have students place their orders prior to the meal service or make their meal selections on-line.

Yes; there is no OVS requirement that the student must be able to make her or his OVS selections on a service line. In these situations, the students are provided choices and thus OVS is followed. These types of systems must be carefully structured and the resulting meals be checked to assure that reimbursable meals are provided. It must be clear to the student and her/his parents what the choices and requirements are for a reimbursable meal.

3. Since a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of fruit or vegetable is required under OVS for a reimbursable meal, how can schools handle situations when a student refuses to take a fruit or vegetable at lunch?

Our goal is for schools to provide each student a complete, reimbursable meal daily. To help accomplish this goal, schools are required to identify the content of the daily reimbursable meal(s). If a student refuses to take the required components/items, his/her meal is not reimbursable and the school/SFA has discretion in how to handle the situation. The school/SFA must have a policy in place regarding a student's selection of incomplete meals, and notify parents/households about such policy. If the school's policy is not to service non-reimbursable meals and not to offer other food options, this policy must be communicated to students and parents in advance. The following are options for the school/SFA:

- Offer the foods for purchase a la carte and any student who has the money either in hand or in his/her account may purchase food a la carte, or
- Allow the student to take the food for free and not claim it for reimbursement.