

What is a “reimbursable meal”?

To explain what a full meal is in the eyes of the USDA, we need to start with the USDA rules. We receive a monetary reimbursement from the Federal Government for each meal we sell to students. **(We do not receive a reimbursement for adult meals or a second full meal for a student.)** We only receive 1 breakfast and 1 lunch reimbursable meal per student, per day. It is considered ala carte after this. In order for us to get that reimbursement we must follow the USDA guidelines. Part of these guidelines are from a program called “Offer versus Serve”. The lunch and breakfast programs are a little different, so let’s just start with lunch.

Lunch:

At **lunch** we are required to “offer” students five components with each meal. Students are required to take three of those five components in order for us to count it as a “reimbursable meal”. **Students are also required to take a serving of fruit or vegetable for us to count it as a reimbursable meal.** The components we offer are:

- **milk, 8 oz. carton** (must be skim or 1% and meet sugar content requirements for flavored milk)
- **meat/meat alternate** (meat, cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt, beans/legumes, some nut products, etc.)
- **bread/grains** (50% of these must be “whole grain rich” and include brown rice, whole wheat bread, pasta breading on meat items, cookies, cereal, corn chips, etc.)
- fruit
- **vegetables** (We also have a minimum requirement for certain subcategories of vegetables according to their color and nutritional content. For example, we are required to offer a “Red Vegetable” once a week.)

There are different requirements for different age groups for certain components. To further complicate things, we are required to make sure students get and exact serving size of each of those items, no more, no less. This is due, in part, to new rules regarding calories and other nutrients in the meal. In previous years we have only had a minimum calorie requirement. Now we have a maximum calorie limit to what we offer. **If a student wants more than one serving of any item, be it fruit, vegetable, bread/grain, meat or milk, the second serving has to be charged as an ala carte item.**

At the High School level, we need to offer 10-12 bread/grain servings each week. At the Middle School we need to offer 8-10 bread/grain servings each week. At the Elementary level, we are required to offer 8-9 servings of bread/grain items each week.

We usually served the hot main entrée item on student’s trays, but they can choose from any of the items we offer. It’s hard to generalize what a student needs to take because the components in the main entrée items are different every day. If students don’t take enough of the required components, they will be asked to put an additional item on their trays. We do not make them eat it, but they will be encouraged to try their fruits and vegetables, especially. If a student refuses to add an item when asked, we have to charge them for each item they do have, ala carte, rather than a student lunch. Here are some examples:

Example 1: The main item is WG spaghetti with meat sauce. We put the pasta and meat sauce on the student’s tray. Because it contains a bread/grain component and the meat component, the student then only needs to take a serving of a fruit or vegetable to meet the minimum requirement for a reimbursable meal. They also can take an 8 oz. carton of milk or other item offered as part of the regular lunch, such as one breadstick, and not be charged.

Example 2: The main item is a baked potato. The potato counts as a vegetable. We would offer diced ham, cheese, and chili as toppings to fulfill the meat/meat alternate component, along with other toppings. In addition to the plain potato, students would have to take two more components for us to count that as a reimbursable meal. They could choose from the protein items for toppings, a fruit, a bread/grain item, or an 8 oz. carton of milk.

Example 3: The main item is chili. The chili counts as the meat/meat alternate item. Students would have to take 2 more components for us to count that as a reimbursable meal. They could choose from an 8 oz. carton of milk, a serving of fruit, a serving of vegetables, or a serving of a bread/grain item. Again, one of the three components on their tray has to be a serving of a fruit or vegetable.

We will also ask some students to take additional items to make a full meal if they are blocked from ala carte or have a negative balance. **Students are allowed to have a reimbursable meal if their account is negative, but cannot get ala carte items.** This is in effort to make sure parent costs are kept down in those circumstances. All students with negative balances are notified.

In the 2013-2014 school year, the USDA has changed some of our guidelines for school breakfast.

Breakfast:

At breakfast we are required to offer three components to students; bread/grain, an 8 oz. carton of milk, and a ½ cup serving of fruit or 100% juice. Reimbursable breakfast offerings include:

- #1: An 8 oz. carton of milk
- #2: A 4 oz. container of juice, or a ½ cup serving of fruit
- #3: 2 oz. equivalent* servings bread
 - *The “oz. equivalent” refers to a USDA chart of various kinds of bread/grain items that meet varying degrees of the requirement. For example, a sweet item such as a cinnamon roll may weigh 2 oz., but only meets 1 oz. equivalent. A slice of 100% whole wheat bread that weighs 1 oz. will meet 1 oz. equivalent.
 - We are allowed to substitute a serving of meat/protein for one of the bread/grain servings, twice each week.

Offer vs. serve at breakfast requires students to take 2 of the 3 components. At minimum, we can count a breakfast as reimbursable if a student takes either an 8 oz. milk or one 6 oz. juice serving with a combination of the bread/grain and meat components. Without being charged for an extra item, students can take a carton of milk, 4 oz. juice/fruit and a combination of the bread/grain and meat components. Cashiers will help students determine if they've taken a full breakfast or not.

In an effort to keep parent's costs down and to teach children moderation and what a balance diet looks like, they will all be asked to only take a full breakfast. Cereal, yogurt, and graham crackers will be an option every day, in addition to the main item. They will need to take milk or juice to make a reimbursable breakfast. Our managers are available for any questions you might have.

At the Middle School and High School, here are some of the items we offer every day:

Muffin, packaged, 1 each: 1 bread/grain serving

One muffin, one milk and one juice = reimbursable breakfast

Cereal with graham crackers, 1 cup serving: 1 bread/grain

One bowl of cereal, one milk, and one juice/fruit = reimbursable breakfast

Hot main entrée breakfast items will usually fulfill the meat/meat alternate or bread/grain requirements, but again, they vary. If students are unsure, they need to take both a carton of milk and a 4 oz. container of juice, or ask the cashier if they have enough items for a full breakfast.

Items* that will always be considered single, a la carte items, unless there is a sign indicating otherwise, are:

Large, plastic bottles of milk (will not count as part of the reimbursable meal)

Large Red Diamond Tea, Splenda Sweet Tea

Granola bars and Cereal bars

Chex Mix and other packaged chips/crackers/cookies

Baked Lays chips

Switch Juice

V8 canned juices

Bottles of water

String Cheese sticks

Yogurt Parfaits (we make these with fresh strawberries and granola)

6 oz. Packaged Container of Yogurt

Whole Wheat Cheese Its

*A la carte items will continue to change and evolve as new products come out, we make our own

items, and items become unavailable. We appreciate your understanding of the nature of this business.