



We Can Do This:
Advice and
Resources for

Meeting the NSLP New Meal Pattern

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We Can Do This: Advice and Resources for Meeting the New Meal Pattern

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Overview

School nutrition leaders are preparing for sweeping changes in the school meal pattern and nutritional standards; schools will need to be ready to meet these standards when the 2012–13 school year begins. The new regulations are designed to improve the nutritional content of school meals in the hopes of changing how American children select foods in order to create a healthier nation.

The new rules present a host of implementation challenges, however, from menu-planning logistics, to public relations, to procedural changes in the lunchroom. To assist school nutrition leaders in making this important transition, USDA and SNA have aggregated a rich array of downloadable resources, best practices, and tools.

Context

The speakers explained the new nutritional and meal pattern requirements for school meals, shared information on resources, and answered common questions SNA has received on the topic.

Key Conclusions

- USDA's new school meal regulations present an opportunity to make a difference in our children's health.**

On July 1, 2012, sweeping new USDA regulations governing school meal standards became effective as a result of the [Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act](#). This legislation directed the USDA to update school meal nutritional requirements to align with the latest "Dietary Guidelines for Americans," which are based on Institute of Medicine recommendations and reflect current nutritional science.

The objective is to address America's childhood obesity problem by updating nutritional requirements for school lunches and breakfasts so that meals are richer in nutrients and lower in calories, saturated fats, sugar, and sodium. The new rules will increase the variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lower-fat milk offered in school meals and eliminate trans fat. The hope is that these updates will change how children eat at school and home, creating better food choice habits that last a lifetime.

This is an exciting time but a challenging one for those who are charged with implementing these changes before doors open for the 2012–13 school year. On one level, the new rules present an opportunity to effect lasting, beneficial change in the lives of

many, creating a healthier nation. On a practical level, however, making the many adjustments that are required will be difficult.

- Implementation of these new nutritional standards will present significant challenges.**

Compliance with the new meal pattern and nutritional standards regulation is not optional. Every reimbursable meal must meet the requirements. Schools cannot choose to forego implementing the changes. The additional \$0.06 per meal they will receive from the government must meet requirements established by USDA.

Yet complying with the new standards will be tough. Menu design will have to be totally rethought in light of the many differences from past nutritional requirements:

- New groupings.* The new rules require food-based menu planning, which eliminates previous options. They categorize foods in more specific ways. For example, no longer are fruits and vegetables interchangeable on a menu. Vegetables are now grouped by color/type (e.g., dark green, red/orange, peas/beans/legumes), with a weekly requirement for offerings in each group. Distinctions are made between whole-grain foods and other grains.
- Daily minimums/weekly maximums.* Servings of meats/meat alternates and grains/grain equivalents are highly regulated, subject to new daily minimums and weekly maximums. Among frequently asked questions SNA has received concern how to stay above daily minimums without running over weekly maximums, all while remaining within the new caloric ranges for meals.
- More precision in measurement.* In measuring, food quantities now must be rounded down to the nearest quarter-ounce. That is critical for compliance, but will take getting used to and will require staff training.
- Different standards for different grades.* Menu requirements differ by grade, with three different sets of requirements for K–5, Grades 6–8, and Grades 9–12. No longer can the same menu be served to K–5 kids and high school students. Schools with grades K–8, however, may use the same menu for all grades, but they will need to put processes in place to ensure that the right quantities are served to the appropriate grades.

The USDA's side-by-side comparison of old and new regulations is available [here](#).

Adding another layer of challenge are the Public Relations and education pieces. Students will need to be educated to choose among offerings in each group (versus taking two items of one

food group and none of another) if intended meal components are to end up on student meal trays. Parents, school staff, and the community will need to understand why these changes are necessary and the school district's approaches to implementing them.

"Use this as an opportunity to engage parents. And it's a great time to engage students in making healthier choices. Schools can set an example."

—Lynn Harvey

▪ **Fortunately, plentiful tools, resources, and best practices to help facilitate this transition are just a click away.**

SNA and USDA recognize the need for information and tools to help districts and schools comply with the new rules. Some of the resources are:

SNA Guidebook, *We Can Do This*

SNA has an ad hoc working group to help members understand the new meal requirements, access information and sample menus, and navigate the menu-certification process. SNA members can download the group's "how-to" guide, *We Can Do This: Advice and Resources for Meeting the NSLP New Meal Pattern*, [here](#). Among its features, the guidebook includes a PR tool kit. It has a sample letter to parents, a sample press release, talking points, and a brochure for kids. Sample menus are included too.

"The how-to guide that the ad hoc group created is a living document that will constantly be updated and revised."

—Penny McConnell

USDA's Best Practices Sharing Center

USDA has created an online Best Practices Sharing Center: [here](#). School food authorities and state agencies with resources, tools, and success stories to share can upload materials by emailing hms@ars.usda.gov.

Those seeking solutions and ideas for implementing the new rules most effectively can search the site by topic (e.g., dietary specification, meat/meat alternates, monitoring tools) or format (e.g., menu, recipe, checklist, training materials, success stories/method of implementation).

More USDA Information and Resources

The USDA also offers:

- A sample menu: [here](#).
- Downloadable slides presenting an overview of the regulations and related issues, to use in staff training sessions: [here](#).
- Policy memos that explain specific features of the regulations, such as the regulations on grains: [here](#).
- Contact people in each state agency: [here](#).
- Further information on the new regulations, technical assistance, and guidance: [here](#).

"Use the tools from the USDA, which should clarify everything for you. Everything is included and is constantly being updated."

—Julie Brewer

The information contained in these summaries reflects BullsEye Resources, Inc.'s subjective condensed summarization of the applicable sessions from School Nutrition Association's 2012 Annual National Conference "Explore New Horizons." There may be material errors, omissions, or inaccuracies in the reporting of the substance of the sessions. In no way does BullsEye Resources or School Nutrition Association assume any responsibility for any information provided or any decisions made based upon the information provided in this document.

FAQ	SNA RESPONSE
<p>1. <i>How can I communicate these new meal pattern changes to my parents, students and employees?</i></p>	<p>A PR tool kit is available to SNA members in the guidebook, We Can Do This: Advice and Resources for Meeting the New Meal Pattern, with a sample letter to parents in English and Spanish, sample press release, and brochure to send home in backpacks.</p>
<p>2. <i>How can I meet and count the minimums and maximums for grains/breads?</i></p>	<p>Rounding to the nearest 1/4-ounce equivalent is a critical concept you need to understand in order to implement the new program. Example: You need to serve at least 1 ounce of grain per day and a maximum of 8–10 ounces per week for Grades 6–8. If you offer more than one grain at a meal, you must add the weights of these grains together and stay within the daily maximum and minimum range — always rounding to 1/4 ounce. All five daily servings must add up to meet the weekly minimum yet not exceed the weekly maximum.</p>
<p>3. <i>How do I address the concerns that the one-ounce portion of protein does not seem like enough for students, especially middle school students?</i></p>	<p>Meat/meat alternates have a daily minimum of a 1-ounce equivalent. But there is a weekly range of 8–10 ounce equivalents per week for students in K–5, and 9–10 ounce equivalents for Grades 6–8. This means that on most days, students will have at least 2 ounces of meat/meat alternates. Consider: if you serve middle school students a hot dog with chili one day that totals 2.5 ounce equivalents, you would have three days in which you could serve 2-ounce equivalent main dishes and only one day during the week where you would serve a 1–1.5 ounce equivalent.</p>
<p>4. <i>How do I identify and account for the correct portion sizes when I have mixed grades and the students come through the serving line in no set grade structure?</i></p>	<p>This situation can occur in schools in which 8th graders are eating lunch with kindergartners, etc. You will have to make modest adaptations to identify the grade levels of the children, as necessary.</p>
<p>5. <i>What are some marketing ideas on fruits and vegetables to educate students on their choices to avoid food waste? What are some positive ways to encourage kids to take vegetables or fruits when they are not used to eating these items at home?</i></p>	<p>Ask the students, even kindergartners, what recipes they enjoy most. Test recipes and be open and receptive to students' input, even when it is negative. Promote positive student participation. Encourage healthful choices at school. Get creative with your vegetable recipes. Use the "Fruits and Vegetables Galore" in the USDA resources.</p>
<p>6. <i>How do I account for components when there is more than one "entrée" choice on the menu? All students go through the same line, but may choose between two or more main item options.</i></p>	<p>If you plan your entrees correctly, this should not be an issue. For example, if breakfast has three components and you offer four, it is okay for students to decline one component. Help the children understand that they have to choose between options. One idea is to use educational kiosks that show the menu of the day. All reimbursable meals must have the right components under the new rules.</p>
<p>7. <i>Where can I find resources to assist me in implementing the new meal guidelines?</i></p>	<p>Use the guides provided by the USDA and the SNA. Use your tool kit. Network among your colleagues for new ideas — you can do this now at the convention. Avoid using sample menus verbatim. Keep in mind we have the opportunity to reshape how Americans eat, not just at school, but everywhere.</p>

FAQ	SNA RESPONSE
8. <i>How do I sort out all of these new requirements? They are very confusing.</i>	The transitional period is the most confusing. Some of the concepts are new, such as minimum/maximum, new categories for vegetables based on nutrients, and new breakfast guidelines. The best advice is to use the tools from the USDA, which should clarify everything. Everything is included and constantly updated. You'll find a long-running list of questions and answers, links to resources, and buying guides here .
9. <i>How do I determine if a grain is a dessert-based grain?</i>	Consult USDA policy memo SP30-2012 , which explains how to credit grains. The new guidelines limit the dessert grains per week.
10. <i>If a student selects ½ cup fruit under OVS [offer versus serve] and then the student selects a vegetable, what amount must the vegetable be to count as one of the three required meal components?</i>	For elementary school students, ½ cup fruit is one component; for high school students, it is 1 cup. For high schools, ½ cup fruit and ½ cup vegetables is one component only, and you need three components. The vegetable must be a full component if fruit is only ½ cup. There is a policy memo and hand-out available about this issue.
11. <i>What is the minimum measure/weight that must be counted? Example: If you have a pre-cooked protein that weighs 2.25 ounces, can it be counted as two ounces or must it be counted as 2.25 ounces?</i>	Always round down to the nearest quarter ounce equivalency.
12. <i>If I offer a choice of vegetables, can I offer two red/orange veggies on the same day?</i>	Each subgroup of vegetables must be offered in required weekly amounts to all students. Students must have access throughout the entire week.
13. <i>Can marinated bean salad be counted as a serving of beans since there are other ingredients in the recipe? How about salsa or Broccoli Normandy? Would the vegetables in these menu items be counted in the "other" group?</i>	You can count by 1/8 th -cup units. If your Broccoli Normandy contains 1/8 th cup broccoli, count that part as green; if it also contains 1/8 th cup carrot, count that amount as orange. If both veggies are in the same group (e.g., a combination of sweet potatoes and carrots), add the amounts together, counting them toward your allotment of that veggie group.
14. <i>How are leafy greens like romaine lettuce, spinach and kale counted?</i>	Uncooked veggies count as half the amount of cooked. Example: One cup lettuce counts as ½ green vegetable.
15. <i>If you serve a two-ounce hot dog with chili, do I count the chili toward the maximum meat/meat alternate component or may the chili be considered only a condiment?</i>	That depends on the amount of chili. Use the rule that you round down to the nearest 1/4 ounce. If you have at least 0.25 ounce of beans and meat in your chili serving, you count that in your weekly meat/meat alternate minimum and maximum. If you have less than 0.25 ounce, it needn't be counted.
16. <i>Are meat/meat alternate choices and bread/grain choices averaged per day? How will the averaging be conducted for multiple choice or serving lines?</i>	We are no longer averaging grains and meats, but we are planning so that we offer a minimum daily and yet do not exceed a maximum weekly amount.
17. <i>Since I already sent out bids for the school year 2012–13, what do I do about the one-ounce meat/meat alternate products for this year in meeting the maximum/minimum meat/meat alternate requirements?</i>	Keep in mind that while one ounce is the daily minimum, the weekly maximum requirements (up to 10 ounces for Grades K–8 and 12 ounces for Grades 9–12) allow for flexibility in planning meat/meat alternate components over the course of the week. You also may be able to adjust your recipes for some items for smaller amounts of meat/meat alternates.