



# OFFER VERSUS SERVE (OVS)

## Tip Sheet for School Food Service Managers

### School Breakfast Program

#### What is OVS?

The goal of OVS is to reduce food waste while allowing students to choose the foods they want to eat. Everyone plays a role. When students and cafeteria staff understand OVS, breakfast lines move smoothly, allowing students to make the most of meal time and enjoy the wholesome and appealing foods they are served. It also helps reduce overall food costs.

Under OVS at breakfast, schools must offer at least four food items from the three required food components (fruit, grains, and fluid milk\*).

- A **food component** is one of three required food groups in a reimbursable breakfast. These are fruits, grains, and fluid milk\*.
- A **food item** is a specific food offered within the three food components, for example, 2 slices of whole grain-rich bread, 1 cup of grapes, and 1 cup of milk. This meal meets OVS breakfast requirements because three food components and four food items are offered.

Students must select at least three of the four offered food items under OVS at breakfast, including at least ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable. Please note, OVS is optional at breakfast for all grade levels.

#### Required Components at Breakfast



**Fruit**

1 cup



**Grains**

1 ounce equivalent  
(oz eq)



**Fluid Milk\***

1 cup

#### Sample OVS breakfast menu:

- Variety of milk\*: fat free or low-fat (1 cup milk)
- Slice of whole grain-rich toast (1 oz eq grain)
- Whole grain-rich cereal (1 oz eq grain)
- Orange slices (1 cup fruit)

#### Optional Components at Breakfast

##### Vegetables

- Vegetables may be offered as a substitute for fruits.

##### Meats/Meat Alternates

- A meat/meat alternate may be served to meet the weekly grain requirement, as long as a 1 oz eq minimum of grains is offered daily.
- A meat/meat alternate may also be offered as an “extra” food (not credited toward meal pattern requirements) if a reimbursable meal is selected.

\*Water does not count as one of the three required food components and cannot be served as a substitute for milk.

## Is it Reimbursable?

For a breakfast to be reimbursable, at least four food items must be offered. Students must select three food items including ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable for the meal to be reimbursable under OVS.

**Use this simple checklist to determine if breakfasts are reimbursable under OVS:**

- Does the meal offered consist of at least four food items?
- Does the meal offered include the minimum required amounts of fruits, grains, and milk\*?
- Does the meal selected by the student contain at least three food items, including at least ½ cup fruit and/or vegetable?



If the answer to each of these questions is yes, the breakfast meal 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.

## Additional Tips for OVS Success

- Post signage (with pictures or graphics) near the beginning of each serving line to help students identify how to build a reimbursable meal and wherever student choices are made.
- Ask cashiers to review the reimbursable meal signage before each meal service.
- 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>