

COVID-19 Menu Planning Strategies

Helpful, Healthy Ideas for Adapting
Your School Meal Service



YOUR SCHOOL MENUS ARE CHANGING

This practical guide offers helpful and flexible strategies for your school menus to adapt to the changing demands of COVID-19 meal service. We consulted with national, state, and local experts to identify strategies that support your program's continued success and creativity during this time. Join our free COVID-19 Community of Practice calls with nutrition service professionals and organizations to learn more.

For more information and to register for the COVID-19 Community of Practice calls, visit www.ecoliteracy.org and www.lunchassist.org.



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MEAL SERVICE ELEMENT	CAFETERIA MEALS	DELIVERY TO CLASSROOM	GRAB AND GO MEALS	MEALS FOR MULTIPLE DAYS	MOBILE MEALS
DESCRIPTION	Meals served in the traditional cafeteria or multipurpose room. Children eating anywhere on campus (outdoors, in the classroom, etc.).	Meals are delivered to and consumed in classrooms.	Unitized meal(s) served directly to the student or parent and taken elsewhere to consume.	Meals served for multiple days at one time. Foods may or may not be offered in bulk.	Meals delivered for one or more days. Foods may or may not be offered in bulk.
MEAL TYPES	Breakfast, Lunch, Afterschool Snack, and At-Risk Afterschool Meals.	Breakfast, Lunch, Afterschool Snack, and At-Risk Afterschool Meals.	Breakfast, Lunch, Afterschool Snack, and At-Risk Afterschool Meals (pending enrichment waiver or with remote-enrichment and state agency approval).	Breakfast, Lunch, Afterschool Snack, and At-Risk Afterschool Meals (pending enrichment waiver or with remote-enrichment and state agency approval).	Breakfast, Lunch, Afterschool Snack, and At-Risk Afterschool Meals (pending enrichment waiver or with remote-enrichment and state agency approval).
DINING SETTING	Cafeteria with social distancing and/or an outdoor cafeteria setup.	Meals consumed in the classroom. Individual classroom teachers may also choose to take their students outdoors during meal time.	<p>In-person instruction: meals served from various points of service around campus and taken to consume anywhere on or off campus.</p> <p>Distance learning: meals served through a walk-up or drive-thru setting and taken to consume off campus.</p>	Meals served through a walk-up or drive-thru setting and taken to consume off campus.	Meals delivered to locations around the community (bus stops, parks, apartment buildings, etc.), or directly to students' homes.
OFFER VS. SERVE	Offer a pre-plated entrée with at least 1/2 cup fruit or vegetable. Additional fruits, vegetables, and milk are optional under offer versus serve. Foods do not need to be pre-packaged since they are on a tray/plate.	Offer a preplated, bagged, or boxed entrée. Fruit and vegetables can be combined with the entrée or on the side. Choice of milk optional under offer versus serve.	Offer single or multiple pre-plated, bagged, or boxed entrée(s) with fruit and vegetable. Choice of milk optional under offer versus serve.	Offer a bag or a box of multiple meals for multiple days at a time. Provide all components for each meal served. Milk may be included, or offered on the side, as an optional component under offer versus serve.	Offer a bag or box with meals for a single day or multiple days at one time. Provide all components for each meal served. Milk may be included, or offered on the side, as an optional component under offer versus serve.

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MEAL SERVICE ELEMENT	CAFETERIA MEALS	DELIVERY TO CLASSROOM	GRAB AND GO MEALS	MEALS FOR MULTIPLE DAYS	MOBILE MEALS
POINT OF SALE	ID card/barcode scanner; pin-pads with hand sanitizer or alcohol wipes; student rosters by classroom; student ID on name badge or ID card. Provision sites may use a clicker or tally sheet.	Student rosters by classroom. Provision sites may use a clicker or tally sheet. Be careful that meal counts are not taken based on attendance.	<p>In-person instruction: ID card/barcode scanner; pin-pads with hand sanitizer or alcohol wipes; student rosters by classroom; student ID on name badge or ID card.</p> <p>Distance learning: student rosters; ID card; POS system with data entry by Child Nutrition Staff; provision sites may use a clicker or tally sheet.</p>	<p>In-person instruction: ID card/barcode scanner; pin-pads with hand sanitizer or alcohol wipes; student rosters by classroom; student ID on name badge or ID card.</p> <p>Distance learning: student rosters; ID card; POS system with data entry by Child Nutrition Staff; provision sites may use a clicker or tally sheet.</p>	Student rosters; ID card; mobile POS system/tablet with data entry by Child Nutrition Staff; provision sites may use a clicker or tally sheet. Meals must be served only to children enrolled in the District.
PACKAGING	Unpackaged foods are placed onto a tray/plate.	Entrées packaged on their own or with fruits and vegetables. Milk offered on the side. Items placed into thermal bags and distributed in the classroom.	Foods are packaged into boat, bag, box, clamshell, etc.	Prepackaged items are packed into a larger box or bag. Bulk fruits and vegetables do not need to be packaged and can be placed directly into the box.	<p>Daily meals: Food can be packaged into boat, bag, box, clamshell, etc., and put into a larger box or bag for delivery.</p> <p>Meals for multiple days: Prepackaged items are placed into a larger box or bag. Bulk fruits and vegetables do not need to be packaged and can be placed directly into the box.</p>

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MEAL SERVICE ELEMENT	CAFETERIA MEALS	DELIVERY TO CLASSROOM	GRAB AND GO MEALS	MEALS FOR MULTIPLE DAYS	MOBILE MEALS
FOOD IDEAS	Same or similar food items to SY 19-20 that staff can pre-plate or dish up.	"Bistro box" style meals with fresh ingredients inside a clamshell or other container. Paper boats or bags with pre-wrapped items. Students take the unit to go. Milk can be taken on the side or not.	"Bistro box" style meals with fresh ingredients inside a clamshell or other container. Paper boats or bags with pre-wrapped items. Students take the unit to go. Milk can be taken on the side or not.	Choose food items that will hold well over multiple days. You may send bulk ingredients such as slices of bread, heads of broccoli, a carton of strawberries, half gallons of milk, etc.	<p>Daily meals: Bag or box of foods with one or more days' worth of food. Students take the unit to go. Milk can be taken on the side or not. Consider using fresh ingredients for items that will be consumed the same day.</p> <p>Meals for multiple days: Consider which items will hold well over multiple days. You may offer some bulk ingredients such as slices of bread, heads of broccoli, a carton of strawberries, half gallons of milk, etc.</p>
FARM TO SCHOOL	In lieu of a salad bar, offer fresh unpackaged farm to school produce on the cafeteria line, placing it directly on to the plate or tray at the time of service.	Whole produce or freshly-cut, prepackaged, local produce.	Whole produce or freshly-cut, prepackaged, local produce.	Offer bulk fruits and vegetables from local farms in the food box or bag.	<p>Daily meals: Whole produce or freshly-cut, prepackaged, local produce.</p> <p>Meals for multiple days: Offer bulk fruits and vegetables from local farms in the food box or bag.</p>

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MEAL SERVICE ELEMENT	CAFETERIA MEALS	DELIVERY TO CLASSROOM	GRAB AND GO MEALS	MEALS FOR MULTIPLE DAYS	MOBILE MEALS
TEMPERATURE	Consider freshly prepared hot meals and fresh cold fruits and vegetables.	Consider hot entrées in a warm thermal bag. Consider fresh fruits, vegetables, and milk in a cold thermal bag.	Consider hot meals, if feasible. Cold or room temperature ready-to-eat items are also a good choice.	Consider dry, refrigerated, or frozen items.	Daily meals: Consider hot entrées in a warm thermal bag or warmers in the delivery vehicle. Meals for multiple days: Consider dry, refrigerated, or frozen items.
EQUIPMENT	Same or similar to SY 19-20.	Thermal bags to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Placemats or trays for eating at desks. Trash cans and cleaning supplies. Wagons or carts for transporting thermal bags between kitchen and classroom.	Utility carts, campus cruiser carts, milk coolers on wheels, extra refrigeration, mobile warmers on wheels, mobile POS stations, fold out tables, pop-up tent for shade/rain protection.	Same as grab n' go, however additional cold and dry storage may be required.	Delivery vehicles such as a food truck, delivery truck, van, or schoolbus. Thermal bags to keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Electric mobile warmers and refrigeration, if vehicles have capacity. Utility carts, fold-out tables, mobile POS stations.
NUTRITION EDUCATION	Taste test cups to go and educational posters in the cafeteria.	Taste test cups to go; educational posters; activities that align to classroom learning; placemats with activities and nutrition facts.	Taste test cups to go; recipes for families; Harvest of the Month newsletters for seasonal produce.	Recipe resources, including videos and recipe cards for utilizing foods in bulk.	Same as grab and go or meals for multiple days at one time.

Sample Menu with Scratch Recipes

	ENTRÉE	GRAINS	M/MA	VEG	FRUIT	MILK	ADD ONS
MON	Roasted Vegetable Pasta Salad	2 oz	2-1/2 oz	Red Bell Pepper Sticks Hummus Entrée Veggies	1/2 c ROV 1/2 c BP 5/8 c OV	Peaches 1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk 1 c
TUE	Brown Rice Chile Verde with Pork	2 oz	1-3/4 oz	Cilantro Lime Corn Salad Entrée Veggies	1/2 c SV 3/8 c OV	Grapes 1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk 1 c
WED	Power Up! Caesar Shaker Salad	1 oz	2 oz	Kale in Entrée	7/8 c DGV	Plums 1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk 1 c Homemade Caesar Dressing
THU	WG Cornbread or Tortilla Chips Garden Vegetable Chili	1-3/4 oz	1-1/4 oz	Tomato Sauce in Entrée Other Entrée Veggies	1/2 c ROV 7/8 c OV	Fresh Cherries 1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk 1 c
FRI	Noodles Asian Beef and Broccoli	2 oz	2 oz	Broccoli in Entrée Cucumber in Fruit Salad	1/2 c DGV 1/4 c OV	Cucumber Melon Mint Salad 1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk 1 c
WEEKLY TOTALS:		8-3/4 WGR	9-1/2 M/MA		5-1/2 c VEG	2-1/2 c FRUIT	5 c MILK

NOTES

- Meal pattern waiver is in place if used for grades 9-12.
- Hummus: serve 5/8 cup to equal 1/2 cup beans/peas.
- Chile Verde with Pork: serve a larger portion for 2 M/MA.
- Power Up! Caesar Shaker Salad: for additional grains, consider adding bulgur or couscous to the salad, or serving with a grain-based dessert on the side.
- Garden Vegetable Chili: serve a larger portion or add shredded cheese for 2 M/MA.
- WG Cornbread: cut into larger portions for a 2 oz WGR serving size.
- Asian Beef and Broccoli: serve with Chinese noodles, spaghetti noodles, or brown rice (1 c = 2 WGR); see [adapted recipe](#) for updated crediting.
- Cucumber Melon Mint Salad: serve 3/4 cup to provide 1/4 cup veggie and 1/2 cup fruit.

Sample Menu with Individually Wrapped Items

	ENTRÉE	GRAINS	M/MA	VEG		FRUIT		MILK		ADD ONS
MON	Bean and Cheese Pupusa	2 oz	2 oz	Jicama Sticks	3/4 c SV	Grapes	1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk	1 c	Salsa Cup
TUE	Bistro Box: Cheese Cubes, Whole Grain Crackers, Hummus, and a Snickerdoodle Cookie	2 oz	2 oz	Celery Sticks	3/4 c SV	Orange Wedges	1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk	1 c	
WED	Slice of Pizza	2 oz	2 oz	Baby Carrots	3/4 c ROV	Peaches	1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk	1 c	Ranch Dressing Cup
THU	Chicken and Cheese Tamale	2 oz	2 oz	Mixed Green Salad Cherry Tomatoes	1/2 c DGV 1/4 c ROV	Plum	1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk	1 c	Chipotle Ranch Dressing Cup
FRI	Asian Chicken and Rice Bowl	2 oz	2 oz	Edamame	3/4 c BP	Seasonal Melon	1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk	1 c	
WEEKLY TOTALS:		10 WGR	10 M/MA		3-3/4 c VEG		2-1/2 c FRUIT		5 c MILK	

NOTES

- Meal pattern waiver is in place if used for grades 9-12.
- Bistro Box: can be assembled using a variety of packaged items, depending upon availability.
- Many individually wrapped items are available from vendors around the country; check with your local supplier for more information on product availability.

Combining Scratch Recipes, Individually Wrapped Items, and Bulk Produce

	ENTRÉE	GRAINS	M/MA	VEG	FRUIT	MILK			
MON	Brown Rice Chile Verde with Pork	2 oz	1-3/4 oz	Entrée Veggies	5/8 c OV				
TUE	Roasted Vegetable Pasta Salad	2 oz	2-1/2 oz	Entrée Veggies	5/8 c OV				
WED	Bistro Box: Cheese Cubes, Whole Grain Crackers, Hummus, and a Snickerdoodle Cookie	2 oz	2 oz						
THU	Bean and Cheese Pupusa	2 oz	2 oz						
FRI	Asian Chicken and Rice Bowl	2 oz	2 oz						
BULK PRODUCE ITEMS				1 Pint Cherry Tomatoes 1 Head Green Leaf Lettuce	1-3/4 c ROV 1-1/4 c DGV	1 Medium Cantaloupe 2 Peaches 1 Plum	2 c 1 c 1/2 c	Nonfat or 1% Milk	1 L + 1 carton
WEEKLY TOTALS:		10 WGR	10-1/4 M/MA	4-1/4 c VEG	3-1/2 c FRUIT	5 c MILK			

NOTES

- Meal pattern waiver is in place if used for grades 9-12.
- Meals picked up on one day for the entire week.
- Day 1 entrée is offered hot and ready to eat at the time of service.
- Day 2 entrée is cold and ready to eat from the refrigerator the next day.
- Day 3-5 entrées can be enjoyed any day during the week and require minimal preparation.
- If meal pattern waiver for veggie subgroups is approved, this veggie menu is compliant for grades K-8.

REFERENCE: SY 2020–2021 NSLP Lunch Meal Pattern

MEAL PATTERN FOR 5-DAY WEEK	GRADES K-5 Amount of Food Per Week (Minimum Per Day)	GRADES 6-8 Amount of Food Per Week (Minimum Food Per Day)	GRADES 9-12 Amount of Food Per Week (Minimum Per Day)
FRUIT	2-1/2 c (1/2 c)	2-1/2 c (1/2 c)	5 c (1 c)
VEGETABLES	3-3/4 c (3/4 c)	3-3/4 c (3/4 c)	5 c (1 c)
- DARK GREEN	1/2 c	1/2 c	1/2 c
- RED/ORANGE	3/4 c	3/4 c	1-1/4 c
- BEANS/PEAS (LEGUMES)	1/2 c	1/2 c	1/2 c
- STARCHY	1/2 c	1/2 c	1/2 c
- OTHER	1/2 c	1/2 c	3/4 c
- ADDITIONAL TO REACH TOTAL	1 c	1 c	1-1/2 c
GRAINS	8 oz (1 oz)	8 oz (1 oz)	10 oz (2 oz)
MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATE	8 oz (1 oz)	9 oz (1 oz)	10 oz (2 oz)
FLUID MILK	5 c (8oz)	5 c (8oz)	5 c (8oz)
NUTRIENT STANDARDS	GRADES K-5	GRADES 6-8	GRADES 9-12
CALORIES	550-650	600-700	750-850
SATURATED FAT	<10%	<10%	<10%
TARGET 2 SODIUM (MG)	≤935	≤1,035	≤1,080

NOTE: Schools may waive the meal pattern requirement with State Agency approval, including vegetable subgroups, minimum portion sizes, sodium requirements, and age/grade groups.



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For more information about this publication, email info@ecoliteracy.org or visit www.ecoliteracy.org.

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The Center for Ecoliteracy is an internationally recognized leader in systems change innovations in education for sustainable living. Since 1995, the Center has engaged with thousands of school leaders from across the United States and six continents. Our mission is to advance the teaching and modeling of sustainable practices in K-12 schools.

ABOUT LUNCHASSIST

Founded by a former Child Nutrition Director, LunchAssist is dedicated to empowering school nutrition professionals to succeed through an extensive collection of innovative tools and training, curated resources, customized consulting, and an online community where school districts and community partners have access to all their professional needs, in one place.

For more information about LunchAssist, visit www.lunchassist.org.

RECIPE CREDITS: California Department of Education: Power Up! Caesar Shaker Salad. The Lunch Box from Chef Ann Foundation: Hummus, Cilantro Lime Corn Salad, Homemade Caesar Salad Dressing, Whole Grain Corn Bread, and Beef and Broccoli. Project Bread: Beef and Broccoli.

PHOTO CREDITS: istockphoto



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