

Section 21

Meal Service

Section 21, Meal Service

Update Guide

February 14, 2025

Clarified guidance on the following topic:

- Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) Family Style Meals

May 19, 2023

Created new *Definitions* and *Contact Information* sections, located at the beginning of the *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)*. Removed definitions and contact information from this section.

July 28, 2022

Updated *Section 21, Meal Service* guidance on donating leftovers based on updates made to the Texas Education Code (TEC) 33.907.

Clarified guidance on the following topic:

- Leftover sharing tables
- Donating foods
- Weekends

August 12, 2020

Created *Section 21, Meal Service* and updated the Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM) section references. Guidance for this new section was taken from the previous *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 19, Other Operational Issues*

Clarified information on the following topics:

- Food truck, food trailer, or modified school bus
- Leftovers
- Mealtimes
- Offer versus serve (OVS)

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Meal Service

The guidance in this section addresses operational issues related to meal service in School Nutrition Programs (SNPs). The guidance in this section applies to the following programs:

- National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
 - Afterschool Care Program (ASCP)
 - Seamless Summer Option (SSO)
- School Breakfast Program (SBP)

This section does not contain meal pattern guidance. Meal pattern guidance is located in the following *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)* sections:

- *Section 7, Breakfast Meals*
- *Section 8 Lunch Meals*
- *Section 9, Pre-Kindergarten Meals*
- *Section 10, Afterschool Snacks & Meals*
- *Section 11, Summer Meal Programs*
- *Section 13, Special Milk Program*
- *Section 25, Meal Accommodations*

Leftover Food

CEs have several options in dealing with leftover food items.

Leftover Sharing Tables

To minimize food waste, schools may set up sharing tables for leftovers from food(s) already served. SNPs must apply all appropriate state and local health and safety regulations to sharing tables, including, but is not limited to, holding temperatures and food contamination.

Leftovers Sold in School Cafeteria

Leftovers that were never served (1) may be sold in the school cafeteria or other designated eating area as second meals or a la carte items or (2) may be incorporated into a future reimbursable meal as long as all state and local health and safety regulations are followed.

When leftovers are sold, (1) the income from the sale of the leftovers must accrue to the nonprofit school food service account and must be tracked as part of documenting nonprogram income.¹ Leftover food items sold as a la carte foods must meet the competitive food requirements.²

The a la carte sale price must include the following costs:

¹ See the *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)*, Section 16, *Financial System* for additional information on nonprogram foods.

² See the *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)*, Section 22, *Competitive Foods* for additional information on this topic.

- Value of USDA Foods
- Purchased foods used to make the item
- Labor to prepare the item
- Overhead

Students Saving Items from Their Meal to Eat Later

Students are allowed to take food items from a meal service with them to eat later **as determined by local policy**. School policies related to students removing food items from the meal service area should be based on whether the item can be carried by the student without a special container and if the item is food safe without refrigeration.

Donating Leftovers

If food from a meal or snack service is leftover and cannot be used for another meal service, the food may be donated.

Donation Agreement

When an SNP donates leftover food to a nonprofit, the CE should create an agreement that provides guidelines for food transfers and food holding and storage.

Donating to Local Food Banks and Charitable Organizations

USDA regulations allow CEs to donate leftover food to eligible food banks and charitable nonprofit organization under the following conditions:

- The CE practices good meal production planning to ensure that one meal per student is produced.
- The CE does not intentionally prepare additional servings, intending to donate extra servings.
- CEs should ensure that policies to support a food donation program do not discourage students from consuming all items served to them.
- The CE cannot use the leftover food for another meal service and food would, therefore, be thrown away.
- State and local health codes are followed in the storage and transport of the leftover food items.

Eligible local food banks and charitable organizations are entities that are exempt from taxes under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 [26 USC. 501(c)(3)].

Further, Texas law allows public and charter schools to donate food to a nonprofit organization through a person who is directly and officially affiliated with the campus, including a teacher or counselor, or through a parent of a student enrolled at the campus.

Good Samaritan Food Donation Act

CEs that make donations under these provisions also have extended protections against civil and criminal liability for persons or organizations when making food donations to the extent provided under the Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act, found in Section 22 of the Child Nutrition Act.

Types of Donated Food

Donations may include:

- unserved food that is packaged on campus and has not been removed from the campus cafeteria;
- packaged served food if the packaging and food are in good condition;
- whole, uncut produce; and
- wrapped raw produce.

CEs must follow all applicable local, state, and federal food safety regulations for handling and storing donated foods.

Distribution of Donated Food

CEs may allow the SNP to donate leftovers from breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack meal service(s). Food may be distributed onsite by the nonprofit organization at any time, including using leftovers from a previous meal service to provide food or a meal to a student who is unable to purchase a meal for breakfast, lunch, supper, or snack. CE's will need to be careful not to overtly identify the eligibility of a student or students if food is distributed during the school day.

Any food given away is not subject to the Competitive Rules. Even if the food or meal provided by a food donation program during a meal service time meets the meal pattern, a CE cannot claim these meals because the food was not provided as part of the SNP meal service.

Use of SNP Equipment

The CE may allow donated food to be received, stored, and distributed onsite. However, a CE needs to keep in mind whether the use of SNP equipment for these purposes is incidental or long term.

If any SNP equipment is used for a food donation program, the CE must maintain documentation that demonstrates (1) that there is negligible cost in using SNP equipment and/or storage and that no additional equipment has been purchased specifically because of or for the donation program or (2) that the cost for equipment and/or storage has been covered by non-SNP sources.

Involving School Nutrition Staff

School nutrition staff may assist in organizing and distributing food as volunteers for the nonprofit food donation program. However, the CE needs to be mindful of how staff charge their time when assisting with the organization and distribution of food.

SNP staff may charge time to the SNP when identifying and organizing food items to be donated but cannot charge time to the SNP when performing operational tasks for the food donation program.

Donating USDA Foods

There are occasionally situations when a CE has ordered USDA Foods and is unable to use the food items in its meal service before storage limitations expire. See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM) Section 14, USDA Foods* for additional information on this topic.

Donating or Selling Food Waste or Scraps

CEs are permitted to donate or sell food waste or scraps for composting or animal feed. Any income from this effort must be applied as income to the nonprofit school food service account. Any costs to the SNP for these types of programs must be reasonable.³

Food Waste or Scraps to Feed Swine

In Texas, no individual, agency, or organization may donate or sell any type of food garbage to swine that contains meat, meat scraps, or items that came in contact with the cooking of meat unless they are licensed to do so. This law applies to all SNP sites.

Adults Eating from a Student's Tray

Parents or caretakers occasionally visit their children during mealtime. TDA encourages their involvement in students' education and the nutrition program. However, an adult is not allowed to consume all or part of a meal served to a student. If an adult eats from a student's tray, that meal is not reimbursable.

Required Response to an Adult Eating from a Student's Tray

If an adult eats from a student's tray, SNP staff must inform the adult that the meal is for the student's consumption and that the adult must either purchase a meal at the school, bring in an outside meal to eat, not eat from the student's tray, or not eat with the student.

Consumption of Reimbursable Meals Outside of Designated Meal Service Area

Reimbursable meals prepared for school nutrition programs are to be served and consumed in the cafeteria or other designated eating areas. However, USDA recognizes that with time-limited meal periods and the increased amount of fruits and vegetables offered at meals, some students may be inclined to save some items for consumption at a later time. There is no federal prohibition of this practice. USDA encourages this practice as a means of reducing potential food waste and encouraging consumption of healthy school meals. For food safety reasons, this practice should be limited to food items that do not require cooling or heating, such as a whole fruit or packaged non-perishable item.

However, meals that are prepared with the intention of being consumed by students outside of the regular school day are not reimbursable.

For Example: Meals given to students to eat on the bus on the way home or meals sent home when there is an early dismissal.

Meal Service Methods

CEs may choose to deliver meals through a variety of strategies including family style, multiple-choice menus, multiple serving stations, offer versus serve (OVS), pre-packaged delivery, and pre-plated meals.

No matter which meal service type, CEs must implement strategies that ensure (1) staff are able to accurately identify a reimbursable meal at the point of service (POS) and (2) students are able to recognize a reimbursable meal during meal service.

³ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 16, Financial System Funds* for additional information on reasonable costs.

Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC)

Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) is an alternative serving method that CEs may use to provide students with a nutritious meal in a familiar setting—their classroom. BIC commonly results in the following outcomes:

- More students eat breakfast; therefore, more students are ready for learning.
- BIC allows teachers to accomplish routine morning tasks—attendance, collecting homework, and announcements—while students are eating breakfast.

Therefore, little, if any, teaching time is lost.

- Food service staff save time since students are usually responsible for clearing away their trash.
- When the food service facilities are not large enough to accommodate all students at one setting, BIC allows breakfast service to be completed more quickly since the site does not have to offer staggered serving times.

BIC works well in many types of circumstances. However, the following conditions will help to support a successful BIC:⁴

- Students are in the same room at the start of each day.
- Buses arrive just before classes begin.
- Teachers are supportive of the breakfast program and realize its importance to learning.
- The cafeteria is centrally located or has methods for delivering meals quickly to classrooms.

Strategies for BIC Service

TDA recommends that CEs develop a written policy on BIC before implementing this program. It is also recommended that the SNP staff obtain the approval and support of administrators, principals, and teachers.

BIC can be served in a variety of ways.

- Meal in a bag
- Individually wrapped items
- Cafeteria style service, eaten in the classroom
- Delivery to the classroom
- Hallway service kiosks
- Pre-order meals delivered to the classroom

Breakfast Carts

Breakfast Carts may be used to bring meals to the students. Meals are often pre-packaged for a student to pick up or to be delivered to a specific location.

⁴ More information on breakfast in the classroom (BIC) is available from USDA at www.fns.usda.gov; the Institute of Child Nutrition at www.nfsmi.org; and the Food Research and Action Center at www.frack.org.

Grab ‘N’ Go Breakfast

The Grab ‘N’ Go method allows breakfast to be served where students are congregating or passing—during transition period or during breaks. Meals may be consumed in a central location or at scattered locations through the building.

Nutrition Break or Second Chance Breakfast

Students are served breakfast during a morning break, usually 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Any breakfast meal served after 10:00 a.m. must not be claimed for reimbursement unless a student is late arriving at school. Commonly reimbursable breakfasts are pre-packaged and ready to serve to each student. Meals may be served from mobile carts, tables, or the cafeteria and must include a variety of milk.

Serving Time

Even though BIC is commonly offered as the day starts, it can be offered later in the morning. Often, older students are not ready to eat early in the morning, so a later time can increase breakfast participation for them.

Family Style Meals

A site may serve meals *family style*. Family style meal service allows students to serve themselves from common dishes of food with assistance from supervising adults. Prepared meals must meet all of the daily and weekly food component/food item requirements and the weekly dietary specifications.

Age-Grade Groups K-12

When family style meal service is used for Age/Grade Groups K-12, the following guidance must be used:

- The supervising adult should initially offer the student the full planned serving of each food component/food item.
[NOTE: However, since portions of food served may be replenished immediately at each table, the initial serving of a food component/food item may be less than the full required minimum quantity.]
- The supervising adult should encourage additional portions and selections as appropriate.
- During family style meal service, the adult supervisor must ensure that each student selects at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable or combination of both during the course of a family style meal service in order for the meal to be reimbursable.

Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) Family Style Meals

When family style meal service is used with Pre-K students, the following guidance must be used:

- A sufficient amount of prepared food must be placed on each table to provide the full required portion **size** of each of the components for all the students and/or adults at the table.
- Students, with assistance as needed, and adults must be allowed to serve the food components themselves with the exception of fluids, including milk and juice. During the course of the meal, it is the responsibility of the supervising adults to actively encourage each student to serve

themselves the full required portion of each food component of the meal pattern.

- Supervising adults who serve the fluid components, including milk and juice, directly to the students must serve the required minimum quantity to each student.
- A pre-K student must take at least ¼ cup of a vegetable or fruit for a meal to be reimbursable.

Multiple Choice Menus

CEs may offer students a choice of menus as a strategy to provide students with a larger selection of food options and increase meal participation. Each meal on the menu must include at least the daily and weekly minimum requirement⁵ for each food component or food item.

Multiple Serving Lines or Stations

For NSLP and SBP, if the CE uses independent serving lines which offer different entrée options or serving stations where students select different components or food items for a reimbursable meal before passing the point of service (POS),⁶ all serving lines or the serving stations as a whole must meet the following requirements:

- Meet the daily required number of components/food items.
- Meet the required serving portion for each as well as the weekly vegetable subgroup requirements for lunch meal service.

Offer Versus Serve

Offer versus serve (OVS) is a serving method designed to reduce food waste and food costs without jeopardizing the nutritional integrity of the meals served.⁷ The food production record must indicate offer versus serve (OVS), if utilized.

For NSLP—OVS is a requirement in the NSLP for senior high schools (age/grade group 9–12) and is an option for lower grade schools.

Residential child care institutions (RCCIs) may be exempted from OVS if their system does not accommodate a structure to use OVS. In these cases, RCCI CEs are encouraged to provide choice to the extent practicable.

For Example: An RCCI could offer fruit, vegetable, and grain components separately to allow student to have a choice about what they want to eat. A basket with a variety of fruits and a separate cooler with milk choices are strategies to implement OVS in this situation.

⁵ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 7, Breakfast Meals, Section 8, Lunch Meals, Section 9, Pre-Kindergarten Meals, and Section 10, Afterschool Snacks & Meals* for additional information on the meal pattern requirements.

⁶ See *Administrator's Reference Manual, Section 20, Counting & Claiming* for additional information on point of service (POS) systems.

⁷ USDA provides detailed guidance on OVS in *Offer Versus Serve, Guidance for the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program*. Available at www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP41-2015av2.pdf. For detailed information on identifying a reimbursable meal under OVS, see the *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 7, Breakfast Meals and Section 8, Lunch Meals*.

For SBP—OVS is not required for any age/grade group under the breakfast requirements; however, CEs may choose to offer OVS at breakfast for any age/grade group.

The following guidance must be used when implementing OVS:

Another Child Nutrition Program, NSLP or SBP Meal Pattern

When operating a CACFP program, CEs following the NSLP or SBP meal patterns must follow the NSLP or SBP OVS requirements for meals (suppers) as applicable. However, OVS at snack is not allowed for any Child Nutrition Program (CNP).

Communication about Reimbursable Meals

For OVS meal service, signage located near or at the beginning of the serving line and shared menus should provide clear information about allowable choices that will help the student easily build a reimbursable meal.

Components Offered under OVS

The planned OVS meal must include all five components for NSLP or the three components for SBP and must be priced as a unit whether the student takes the minimum number of food items or components or not.

For NSLP reimbursable meal, a student must take three of the five components; one of the components must be a ½ cup serving of fruit or vegetable.

For SBP reimbursable meal, a student must take three of the four food items which include the three breakfast components; one of the components must be a ½ cup serving of fruit (or vegetable substituted for fruit).

Offering choices within a single component is not OVS.

In offering a reimbursable meal under OVS, CEs are encouraged to give students options of entrees and side items and are always required to offer a variety of milk.

Sample Straight Serve, Not OVS

The student must take one item from each of the following components:

- Grains Component—2 different grain items
- Fruit Component—2 different fruit items
- Vegetable Component—2 different vegetable items
- Meat/Meat Alternate Component—2 different meat/meat alternates
- Milk Component—2 milk flavors

In this case, the student only has a choice of items within each component.

This is not an acceptable OVS practice. While choices within components are allowable, to meet the requirements for OVS, the student must be given a choice of which components to take.

Sample OVS

The student must take least three components from the 4 options below. Meat/Meat Alternates and Grains are offered as one food item. The student must take at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable for the meal to be reimbursable:

- Meat/Meat Alternate & Grains Components—2 different meat/meat alternate/grain items
- Fruit Component—2 different fruits
- Vegetable Component—2 different vegetables
- Milk Component—2 milk flavor

While there is a choice of items for each component, the student also has a choice to take 3, 4, or 5 components. **This is an acceptable example of OVS**; the student is able to take a variety of options among the components.

When a student declines a full portion of a food item, a smaller portion of a component may be offered. However, the student must still take the required number of components in the correct serving sizes for the meal to be reimbursable.

Menu Planning under OVS

If a student is required to select all components, the CE is not utilizing OVS. SNP directors and menu planners should consider participation and selection trends to determine what food items to offer and how much food to prepare. It is the menu planner's discretion to determine the variety of food items offered for a reimbursable meal under OVS.

A student's reimbursable meal is determined by how each food item offered is menued. A CE may menu several items that fall within one component in equal or varied quantities. Students may be required to take paired items in order to meet meal pattern requirements as long as the student is still given a choice of items.

In these situations, the CE must (1) ensure that the cashier is able to identify a reimbursable meal and (2) provide instructions to students so that students know how much to take of any one or more items to get a reimbursable meal.

Meal Preparation

CEs must prepare enough servings for each student to take the full-required portion size amount for the age/grade group for each food component or item.

Milk under OVS

In all cases, students must be given a choice of milk when OVS service is used.

Pre-Ordered Meals under OVS

CEs may use a system where students pre-order a reimbursable meal under OVS. CE's must ensure that the ordering system has a method to communicate what items must be selected for a reimbursable meal.

Salad or Theme Bars under OVS

If a site uses OVS as a method for serving a reimbursable meal, the salad or theme bar

1. must be available to all students on any day a salad or theme bar is offered;⁸
2. must meet the weekly required offerings for fruit or vegetables over the course of the week including juice or vegetable subgroups; and
3. must provide the minimum daily and weekly required servings of grain.

When planning a menu that includes a salad or theme bar as a part of a reimbursable meal or a complete meal, the menu planner must take the following actions:

- Make sure that the minimum portion sizes are consistent with the meal pattern requirements for the serving size for the age/grade group and creditable amount to be counted toward a reimbursable meal.
- Monitor the components that contribute toward a reimbursable meal.
For Example: The minimum creditable amount for fruit is 1/8 cup. On the menu and signage in the serving area, the menu planner lets students know the amounts of each food item or the combination of food items that contribute toward the appropriate portion size for each component for a reimbursable meal. At the POS⁹, the cashier uses the menu planner's information to determine if a reimbursable meal is selected by the student.

Pre-Plate Delivery System

CEs with a pre-plate delivery system must inform students that they may request the server to remove any unwanted item(s) from their plates for NSLP and SBP. Strategies to provide this information may include announcements by homeroom teachers or posters in the cafeteria.

All students must be able to select their own milk from a variety of milk types offered.

Pre-Packaged or Pre-Proportioned Delivery System

CEs may pre-package or pre-proportion menu items in specific serving size portions for NSLP and SBP. The pre-packaging or pre-proportioning system (1) must allow students to take at least the minimum daily requirement of all components for the age/grade group; (2) must provide a method for students to have a choice of what menu items to take if using OVS; and (3) must give students the option to refuse any food item(s).

⁸ See the *Special Guidance, Meal Service* subsection in this section for additional information on the application of this requirement in an ISS context.

⁹ See *Administrator's Reference Manual, Section 20, Counting & Claiming* for additional information on point of service (POS) systems.

Salad or Theme Bars

Salad and theme bars are an effective strategy for providing a wider range of food choices and increasing acceptability for NSLP and SBP. They can be used for the following types of items or meals:

- A la carte food items
- Food Component—one food component, multiple food components, or a complete meal of three or more components for a reimbursable meal.

This type of food service may be used for any age of student. However, it is critical that CEs make sure that all sites using salad or theme bars follow appropriate health and safety precautions.¹⁰

Serving Utensils

CEs using salad bars are required to use specific serving size utensils to meet quantity requirements to encourage students to take appropriate food amounts. Regardless of the serving utensils used, SNP staff must ensure that the portions on students' trays meet the meal pattern requirements for the meal to be reimbursable.

Vegetable Subgroups

Vegetable subgroups offered on a salad or theme bar must be listed on the planned menu and identified on production records.¹¹

Point of Service (POS) for Salad or Theme Bars (NSLP and SBP)

If the site has a salad bar, students may be able to make an entree salad or a side dish menu item from the various ingredients. Food components or food items located on a salad or theme bar must be labeled, listed on the menu, or otherwise identified so that students can easily recognize all the food components and serving sizes for a reimbursable meal. This includes information that allows students to select the correct quantities of fruit or vegetables.

CEs are also required to monitor the food components or items taken and the portion size of each serving taken if the student is selecting food components or items that are credited toward a reimbursable meal or for a complete reimbursable meal. The cashier at the POS¹² must be trained to accurately judge the quantities of self-serve items on trays, so the cashier can determine if the food/menu item can count toward a reimbursable meal.

For Example: Students and cashiers are informed that the entree salad consists of two scoops of tuna or chicken salad plus a bowl of lettuce, a spoon of tomatoes, and small bowl of carrots. The side salad/menu item could be a bowl of lettuce and other vegetables or a bowl of fruit salad.

If the salad or theme bar is not monitored after the POS,¹³ any items taken from the salad or theme bar are considered Extra food. Extra food cannot be credited toward a reimbursable meal but must be included in the required dietary specifications for the week: calories, sodium, and saturated and trans fats.

¹⁰ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 26, Food Safety* for additional information on this topic.

¹¹ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 30, Records Retention* for more additional information on this topic.

¹² See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 20, Counting & Claiming* for additional information on point of service (POS) systems.

¹³ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 20, Counting & Claiming* or additional information on point of service (POS) systems.

Pre-Packaging and Pre-Proportioning for Salad or Theme Bars

Food items on salad or theme bars may be offered in prepackaged or pre-proportioned amounts. Prepackaged or pre-proportioned food or menu items may help cashiers at the POS¹⁴ determine if the items chosen are creditable toward a reimbursable meal. If pre-packaging and pre-proportioning are used under OVS, CEs must make sure students are still allowed a choice of items.

Resources for Salad and Theme Bars

The following web-based sources may help CEs to establish a safe and successful salad or theme bar:

- *Best Practices: Handling Fresh Produce in Schools*, a USDA and Institute for Child Nutrition fact sheet that provides specific food safety recommendations for produce
Available at www.fns.usda.gov/best-practices-handling-fresh-produce-schools
- *Fruits and Vegetables Galore: Helping Kids Eat More*, a USDA publication that contains information on how to train students on salad bar etiquette
Available at www.fns.usda.gov/tn/fruits-vegetables-galore-helping-kids-eat-more
- *Program Information Manual, Retail Food Protection: Recommendations for the Temperature Control of Cut Leafy Greens during Storage and Display in Retail Food Establishments*
Available at www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/IndustryandRegulatoryAssistanceandTrainingResources/ucm218750.htm
- *Program Information Manual: Retail Food Protection Storage and Handling of Tomatoes*
Available at www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/RetailFoodProtection/IndustryandRegulatoryAssistanceandTrainingResources/ucm113843.htm
- *Retail Food Safety Program Information Manual: Safe Handling Practices for Melons*
Available at www.fda.gov/media/116691/download

Vending Machines

CEs may use vending machines as a method of serving a reimbursable meal as long as the vending machines are able to price a reimbursable meal as a unit. When vending machines are used to offer a reimbursable meal, the machines are subject to the same procedures, menu planning requirements, competitive food rules, and offer versus serve (OVS) requirements that are applicable to meals offered on a service line with a cashier.

The CE is responsible to ensure that the vending system is able to do the following:

- Dispense reimbursable meals that meet the meal pattern requirements. Vending machines may provide the same service as a different OVS line, i.e., different machines may be treated as different serving lines with different OVS options or a vending machine may be a different OVS line. All meals offered through

¹⁴ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 20, Counting & Claiming* for additional information on point of service (POS) systems.

vending machines must be planned to meet the daily and weekly meal pattern requirements, including a variety of milk for students to choose from.

- Document when a reimbursable meal has been selected by an eligible student. Documentation includes counting the number of reimbursable meals served by each eligibility category: free, reduced-price, and paid. However, the vending machine system must prevent overt identification of the eligibility of any student.
- Prevent a free or reduced-price student from receiving more than one reimbursable meal per service period. A student may pay for a second meal if the student chooses to do so, but only one meal per student is reimbursable.
- Have a method in place to prevent a vending machine from dispensing meals or food items when it is no longer able to dispense a complete reimbursable meal. When a vending machine is out of reimbursable meals, there has to be method to prevent the machine of vending any food or beverage item in order to ensure that a student does not buy a meal assuming it is reimbursable when it is not.

If a CE plans to operate vending machines to serve reimbursable meals, the CE must notify TDA of its intent by completing the *Vending Machine to Dispense Reimbursable Meals* form (SNP-000) which is located in TX-UNPS, Download Forms.¹⁵ TDA will provide information on the requirements for vended reimbursable meals and assist the CE in developing appropriate strategies to meet vended meal requirements.

Alternative School or In School Suspension (ISS)

When serving meals to students in an alternative school or ISS facility, CEs must apply the following requirements as appropriate to their serving situation:

- All students, including ISS students, must have equal access to all food service lines if they are allowed to go to the cafeteria to receive meals during regular meal service periods.
- If ISS students are only allowed access to the cafeteria before or after regular serving times, they may be limited to one reimbursable line. In this situation, the ISS students must receive and consume their meals prior to or after the regular meal periods for other students. They may consume these meals in the cafeteria or in another location.
- If the alternative school or ISS site participates in NSLP or SBP, students must not be required to bring a meal when there is a meal service on the campus. However, in cases where no foodservice is available at the location where the students are assigned, the CE is not required to provide meals.
- Students attending an alternative school or ISS site may be served a different meal than students attending school in regular school sites. In this case, the meal served must be a reimbursable meal, and the student must be allowed to choose from a variety of low-fat and fat free milk.

Field Trips or Special Events

When planning for meal service at special functions for all Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs), parties, field trips, or other special events, the CE must ensure (1) that students are not denied

¹⁵ See the Contact Information for the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), Food and Nutrition page located on the page following the Table of Contents for information on how to contact TDA.

meals or a variety of milk; (2) that there is no overt identification of eligibility; and (3) that meals claimed for reimbursement meet meal pattern requirements.

The SNP may provide sack lunches for only those students who request one. Request forms used for field trips must not include eligibility status.

Offsite Classes

If students enrolled at one of the CE's sites attend classes at an offsite facility that does not participate in the school nutrition program, a CE may provide reimbursable meals during the period of time when students are attending classes at the offsite facility. Students must be in attendance at the offsite facility when the meals are served, and meals must be served during the regular site's normal mealtime. The meal service must be congregate service when multiple students are in attendance at the offsite facility.

Offsite classes commonly include, but are not limited to, students enrolled in offsite work-study or alternative academic program classes. The meal may be a sack lunch or other appropriate service method.

Mobile or Temporary Serving Sites

Contracting Entities (CEs) may find mobile or temporary feeding sites helpful during summer operation and/or during the rest of the school year. Mobile or temporary serving sites can take many forms including, but not limited to, school buses retro-fitted to be a mobile site (*food truck type service*)¹⁶ and temporary sites set up outside of the school building for special events.

For Example: A site sets up food booths during a field day. Each booth serves a different reimbursable meal. Students pick up a choice of milk at the checkout table (point of service) where the cashier records the meals served.

A site sets up a temporary serving site under a tent at an extra-curricular event to provide reimbursable meals for enrolled and visiting students. Operating a serving site at the event will help the site meet the demands of serving a large number of visiting students and provide meals to enrolled students who are participating in the event.

A CE retrofits a school bus as a serving site. The school bus provides meals at a different site each day of the week. Students enjoy the food truck atmosphere.

Special Guidance for Mobile Serving Sites

As CEs use mobile or temporary serving sites, they need to consider the following guidance:

Competitive Food Requirements

If a la carte items are sold, mobile and temporary sites must meet the competitive food standards.¹⁷

Counting and Claiming

All mobile or temporary sites must have a method to record the reimbursable meals or a la carte items served. When meals are served to visiting students, the receiving and sending CEs should determine whether the receiving or sending site will claim the reimbursable meals.¹⁸

¹⁶ Before purchasing a food truck, food trailer, or modifying a school bus for meal service, CEs need to review the guidance provided in the *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 16, Financial System*.

¹⁷ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 22, Competitive Foods* for additional guidance on competitive food requirements.

¹⁸ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 20, Counting & Claiming* for additional guidance on claiming reimbursable meals served to visiting students.

Financial

There are financial issues the CE will need to consider when it uses a mobile feeding site: See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)*, Section 16, *Financial System* for additional guidance on allowable and unallowable costs.

Health and Safety

Mobile and temporary sites must follow all applicable health and safety regulations. This includes, but is not limited to, addressing mobile and temporary sites in the CE's Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) plan, holding foods at safe temperatures, and food handling safety.¹⁹

Meal Service Options

CEs may use a variety of meal service options including pre-plated and offer versus serve (OVS). However, in all cases, meal services must be congregate.

Point of Service (POS) System

If the CE is not able to use its regular point of service system to record information about meals or a la carte items served at mobile or temporary sites, the CE must have a second method to record this information and retain document to demonstrate the accuracy of counting and claiming.²⁰

When a mobile site is used, the CE must include information about the POS system for the mobile site in its *Policy Statement for Free and Reduced-Price Meals, Attachment B: Meal Count/Collection Procedures (Attachment B)*.

CEs must also ensure that there is no overt identification when recording meal service information.

Special Guidance, Meal Service

Disciplinary Action

USDA guidance prohibits the denial of meals as a disciplinary action for any student who is enrolled in a school operating a school nutrition program. This does not include disciplinary action which suspends the student from attending school.

Farm to School and School Farm or Garden Programs

Educational activities offered in farm to school and school farm or garden program may provide benefits to school food service operations in a variety of ways: improving student attitudes toward fruits and vegetables, increasing student consumption of fruits and vegetables and improving job satisfaction for school nutrition team members. Farm to school and school farms and gardens may be used to incorporate locally or regionally produced foods into the meal service for all NSLP and SBP programs and integrate hands-on learning activities and food-related education into classroom instruction.

Common educational activities include classroom lessons, field trips to local farms, or meet the farmer day.

¹⁹ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)*, Section 16, *Food Safety* for more information on this topic.

²⁰ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM)*, Section 20, *Counting & Claiming* for additional guidance on claiming reimbursable meals served to visiting students.

Health and Safety

In selling garden produce, the CE must also follow all federal, state, and local requirements regarding health and safety regulations.

Leftover Garden Produce

Any leftover produce from the garden may be used for other child nutrition programs. If that is not possible, the garden program may sell the produce to the public as long as the profits accrue to the nonprofit school food service account or may donate the leftovers in accordance with state and local health and safety regulations.

Mealtimes for Breakfast, Lunch, and Snack

The following meal service times apply to school nutrition programs (SNPs):

Program	Time Requirements
ASCP	After the end of the regular school day ²¹ For half-day school programs and split-session kindergarten programs, students can be served snacks at the end of their school day provided all other program eligibility requirements are met. The snack program has no ending timeframes.
NSLP	10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Meal must be served prior to 2 p.m., but students may continue to eat after 2 p.m.
SBP	Prior to 10 a.m.; however, CEs are encouraged to allow students to eat breakfast when they are late arriving at school.
All Programs, Time Between Meals	For SNP, there are no requirements related to the amount of time between the beginning of one meal and beginning of the next. However, if a CE provides meals under the Child and Adult Care Food Program At-Risk (CACFP At Risk) afterschool program, the CE must allow two hours between a snack served under ASCP or CACFP At Risk and supper meal service.

Adequate Meal Service Periods

USDA encourages sites to make every effort to establish meal periods that are long enough for students to fully consume their meals and to provide an environment conducive to eating those meals. It is important, both nutritionally and socially, to give students sufficient time, conducive atmosphere, and safe environment to eat nutritious meals.

The following resources provide information on current research related to adequate meal service periods:

- *The Relationship Between the Length of the Lunch Period and Nutrient Consumption in the Elementary School Lunch Setting* (Ethan A. Bergman, PhD,

²¹ See *Administrator's Reference Manual, Section 10, Afterschool Meal Programs* for additional information on the end of the regular school day.

RD, CD, FADA; Nancy S. Buerger, MS, RD, CD; Timothy F. Englund, PhD; and Annaka Femrite, MS, RD) *Journal of Child Nutrition & Management*

Available at

<http://docs.schoolnutrition.org/newsroom/jcnm/04fall/bergman/bergman2.asp>

- *Amount of Time to Eat Lunch Is Associated with Children's Selection and Consumption of School Meal Entrée, Fruits, Vegetables, and Milk* (Juliana F.W. Cohen, ScD, ScM; Jaquelyn L. Jahn, Scott Richardson, MBA; Sarah A. Cluggish, MBA; Ellen Parker, MBA, MSW; Eric B. Rimm, ScD) *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*.

Available at [http://www.andjrn.org/article/S2212-2672\(15\)01248-4/fulltext](http://www.andjrn.org/article/S2212-2672(15)01248-4/fulltext)

Non-Traditional Meal Service Times

TDA may grant reasonable variances to meal service times in the following circumstances:

1. Accommodation of special circumstances for traditional students during traditional mealtimes which includes limitations caused by capacity of facility and length of school day

For Example:

- The CE cannot provide a complete meal service to all program participants because its facilities do not have the capacity to accommodate the number of meals served.
- The CE has extended school hours.

2. Accommodation of special circumstances for traditional students with non-traditional mealtimes which includes situations where students are not on campus during the regular school day

For Example:

- Credit recovery or graduation programs that operate on a non-traditional school day schedule
- Work study programs that allow students to work during the regular school day and attend classes in the late afternoon or evening

Exemptions to the meal service time are made on a case-by-case basis. TDA may also grant an exemption for a limited period of time when warranted. It is not necessary for a CE to seek approval each year after an approval is made if the conditions upon which the approval was made remained unchanged. However, if the circumstances do change, the CE must resubmit the request for an approval.²²

To obtain an approval for non-traditional meal service time, CEs must indicate meal service times they plan to implement in the Application Packet in TX-UNPS. Once a CE indicates a non-traditional meal service time, TDA will contact the CE.

[NOTE: Evening meals served to students in adult education courses are not eligible for a meal exemption.]

Weekends

Saturday *or* Sunday breakfast and lunch meals may be served and claimed as long as the classes are part of the regular CE's instructional program, and students are required to

²² See the Contact Information for the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), Food and Nutrition page located on the page following the Table of Contents for information on how to contact TDA.

attend classes. A school-affiliated extracurricular event or activity, such as football, band, or choral activity is not eligible for weekend meal service.

Refer to the *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM) Section 28, Residential Child Care Institutions* for additional information regarding RCCIs and weekend meals.

Year-Round CEs or Schools

Year-round CEs or schools may claim reimbursement for eligible meals. If the CE or school has implemented a multi-track system (not all students in a school are attending school at the same time), the CE must ensure that systems are in place to distinguish students participating in an instructional track from students who are off track. However, year-round CEs or schools may provide reimbursable meals to enrolled students who are off track (not attending class because of school breaks or vacations) if the students are engaged in school-sponsored educational activities on the school campus.

Special Schedules

If there is a special event, such as testing or a field day, the CE does not need a waiver to adjust mealtimes for this type of special schedule. The CE does not need to update the site application in TX-UNPS to reflect an adjusted mealtime for this type of special event.

Information Box 1

Record Retention

Public and charter schools are required to keep documentation related to school nutrition programs for 5 years.

Private schools, other nonprofit organizations, and residential childcare institutions (RCCIs) are required to keep documentation for 3 years.

Other Food Sales

A La Carte

CEs may provide an a la carte service as long as they also offer a reimbursable meal to all students.

At Breakfast

If a student chooses less than three food items menued for a reimbursable breakfast (including a minimum serving of fruit or vegetables), the student must pay the a la carte price of those items if this is the CE's policy when a student does not select a reimbursable meal.

At Lunch

If a student chooses less than three food components menued for a reimbursable lunch (including a minimum serving of fruit or vegetables), the student must pay the a la carte price of those items if this is the CE's policy when a student does not select a reimbursable meal.

A la carte prices should be set to cover the total cost of each menu item.²³ All a la carte sales must meet all applicable Competitive Food Nutrition Standards.²⁴

Records Retention

The CE is required to maintain an organized system of record retention that is accessible to appropriate CE staff members and federal or state reviewers. TDA may request documentation for both offsite and onsite administrative reviews. CEs also have the option to maintain records

²³ See *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 19, Meal Pricing* for additional information on this topic.

²⁴ See the *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 22, Competitive Foods* for additional information on a la carte sales and the competitive food requirements.

in paper or electronic form. The *Administrator's Reference Manual (ARM), Section 30, Records Retention* has additional information on the records CEs must retain.

A La Carte

The CE must retain records related to competitive foods, including, but not limited to, nutritional profile of food and beverages served, income, and cost.

Reimbursable Meals

The CE must retain food production records, menus, POS service records, and other documentation related to meal service as well as income and cost.

Leftovers

The CE must retain records that demonstrate how leftovers are handled.

Meal Service

The CE must retain records indicating meal service times, including special event schedules and mealtime waivers, if applicable.

The CE must retain records of meal service methods, including OVS methods, as required or applicable.

Compliance

TDA will review documentation submitted through TX-UNPS, retained onsite during Administrative Reviews (ARs), or on request to ensure that the CE is compliant with the regulations described in this section. TDA may require an approvable corrective action plan if the CE does not comply these requirements.