

School Nutrition Program At-A-Glance

Topic: Family Style School Meals in the NSLP

Overview

Family style is an optional meal service method in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) that allows students to serve themselves food from communal dishes and decline some of the food offered. This service option is distinct from Offer Versus Serve and includes its own requirements. It is typically used in preschool settings.

Using this approach, students sit at tables with supervising adults who determine when a student has selected a reimbursable meal. The goal of family style meal service is to reduce food waste in school meal programs while permitting students to decline foods they do not intend to eat.

Requirements:

Supervising

- ✓ Supervising adults must be trained in family style meal service
- ✓ Supervising adults must initially **offer** the full planned serving of each food component to each student
- ✓ Supervising adults should **encourage** additional portions and selections to meet the full required minimum serving sizes
- ✓ If supervising adults serve foods in lieu of students serving themselves, each meal component students choose must be served in the full required serving size for the student's age/grade group.
 - Keep in mind: Once students have been served at least ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable (¼ cup for preschoolers), they may decline other food components

Serving

- ✓ **Students in grades K-12 must take at least ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable to count the meal for reimbursement**
- ✓ **Preschool students must take at least ¼ cup of fruit and/or vegetable to count the meal for reimbursement**
- ✓ Serving tables must have full servings of each food component available for every student and supervising adult (if eating with students)
- ✓ Students may serve themselves from common dishes of food with assistance from supervising adults
- ✓ The initial serving selected of a food component/food item may be less than the full required minimum quantity when students serve themselves. Supervising adults should encourage additional portions to meet full required minimum serving sizes.

Meal Counts

- ✓ Meal Counts must be taken once students are seated at the table and have selected foods which include at least ½ cup of fruit and/or vegetable (¼ cup for preschool students).

Additional Information

Keep the following food safety considerations in mind:

- Ensure proper serving utensils are available for each serving dish
- Best practice would be to have all students wash their hands before the mealtime
- Ensure extra portions and serving utensils are available in case of dropped or contaminated food

Consider offering smaller serving utensils or smaller serving dishes for preschool-aged children.

Students should be allowed to take second servings after everyone is served, provided dietary specifications are not exceeded. These additional servings are **not** considered second meals.

Helpful Resources:

[USDA Offer Versus Serve Guidance Manual](#)

[Family Style Meal Service Handout](#)

[Serving School Meals to Preschoolers](#)

Regulatory Reference:

[USDA Memo SP 35-2011, CACFP 23-2011](#)

[FNS Instruction 783-9](#)

[7 CFR 226.20\(n\)](#)

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Acronym Reference and Definitions

NSLP	National School Lunch Program
SBP	School Breakfast Program