

School Nutrition Program At-A-Glance

Topic: Reimbursable Meals for Field Trips

Overview

Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (CNA), (42 U.S.C. 1773(b)(1)(A)) specify that meals reimbursed under the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program must be consumed onsite. However, [USDA Memo SP 17-2025 Reimbursement for Off Site Meal Consumption](#) outlines an exception if individual students or groups of students, who would normally be on site for the regularly scheduled meal service, are participating in an off-site school function or extracurricular activity and will return back to school. In this situation, meals provided for off-site consumption can be claimed for reimbursement.

General Requirements:

For field trip meals to be considered reimbursable:

- ✓ An accurate point of service meal counting system must be in place.
- ✓ All meal pattern requirements must be met.

Additionally:

- ✓ Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) procedures must be followed.

Point of Service (POS):

Meals are counted at that point in the food service operation where it can be accurately determined that a reimbursable free, reduced-price, or paid meal has been served to an eligible student. The Point of Service must occur when the student is served the meal. For field trips, the point of service is the point in the meal service at the field trip site where staff can accurately determine that all required components for a reimbursable meal have been served to the child.

For standard counting and claiming, the individual student that received the reimbursable meal must be recorded; a meal roster or a portable electronic point of service can be used. For Community Eligibility, Provision 2 Non-Base Year and the Seamless Summer Option, each reimbursable meal served to an eligible student must be recorded. Allowable point of service methods in this situation include meal tally sheets and clicker counts.

Whatever point of service meal counting method is utilized, a supervising adult is required to record the student received a reimbursable meal as the exchange is happening.

The following are not allowable meal counting methods:

Pre-Orders: Using pre-orders to count meals prior to meal service or the number of meals that were sent on the field trip.

Count Backs: Counting the number of meals that were returned and subtracting them from those sent to conclude the total number of meals served.

Attendance counts: Using the number of students in attendance on the field trip as a meal count.

The field trip meals may only be added to the school's meal count for the day when documentation of the point of service meal count is provided to support the field trip meal count. This documentation must be retained on file.

Meal Pattern:

Offer versus serve (OVS) is **not** required for field trips for any grade level. If not utilizing OVS, all meals must contain all the required components in the minimum daily quantity for the grade group served.

Daily Lunch Meal Pattern			
Meal Components:	Grades K-5	Grades 6-8	Grades 9-12
Meat/Meat Alternates (oz. equivalents)	1	1	2
Grains (oz. equivalents)	1	1	2
Vegetables (cups)	$\frac{3}{4}$	$\frac{3}{4}$	1
Fruits (cups)	$\frac{1}{2}$	$\frac{1}{2}$	1
Fluid Milk (cups)	1	1	1

Daily Breakfast Meal Pattern	
Meal Components:	All Grades
Grains Meat/Meat Alternates (oz. equivalents)	1
Fruits (cups)	1
Fluid Milk (cups)	1

Field trip meals must be accounted for in the weekly minimum requirements. More than the minimum daily requirement may need to be offered/served in the grain and meat/meat alternate components to meet the weekly minimum requirements.

Milk:

Field trip meals must always include fluid milk. The NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 require a variety (at least two different choices) of low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk, either unflavored or flavored. Students must be offered a choice of milk for field trip meals. Juice or water cannot be served as a substitute for fluid milk.

Offer versus Serve (OVS):

OVS is allowable but not required for field trip meals. Under OVS students must be allowed to decline food components or items of their choice. The option to decline just one of the components or food items, such as milk, is not allowable under offer versus serve.

Implementation of OVS for field trips can be challenging, as field trip staff would have to be trained on identifying a reimbursable meal.

Students may preselect meal components/food items prior to the field trip. This can be done on an order form that presents all options for students to choose from, or by having students come to the cafeteria and select their meal, which is then assembled for later consumption.

Production Records:

Field trip meals are required to have completed production records retained on file as part of the NSLP record keeping requirement.

Food Safety:

Field trip meals must comply with HACCP procedures. The greatest food safety concern for field trip meals is ensuring that foods defined as “Time/Temperature Control for Safety Food” (TCS) stay at proper temperatures during transport and service.

TCS cold foods must be kept at 41°F or below, or consumed within four hours if stored below 70°F. Insulated coolers, ice packs and/or ice should be used to maintain a safe food temperature. Food temperatures must be monitored and documented.

If food cannot be maintained at a safe temperature, non-TCS foods, including shelf stable milk, should be served.

Staff serving the meal must not have bare hand contact with ready to eat foods.

Other considerations:

- USDA does not require SFA’s to provide meals for off-site field trips. Local policy for providing field trips should be applied consistently at the local level.
- Modifications to standard meals for students with allergies, restrictions or other accommodation must be made for field trip meals.
- Lunch must be served between 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM
- Breakfast must be served at or near the beginning of the school day
- Non-food service staff, whose responsibilities include duties related to the operation of school nutrition programs, must be adequately trained to perform those duties.
- Staff who conduct field trip meal counts must receive appropriate training to ensure they perform their jobs effectively and in compliance with USDA’s regulations.
- USDA requires annual civil rights training for all staff who interact with NSLP and SBP applicants or participants, including staff involved with serving field trip meals.
- USDA encourages potable water to be provided for school-related functions, however this is not required for field trips.

Best Practices:

The following practices to ensure compliance with the USDA's requirements for field trip meals in the NSLP and SBP.

Develop and distribute a written procedure regarding the requirements for field trip meals. The written procedure should address:

- The process for ordering meals for field trips;
- How to identify a reimbursable meal;
- Instructions for conducting field trip POS meal counts;
- How to handle left over meals or foods (including milk)

Develop a HACCP based standard operating procedure (SOP) for field trip meals that includes:

- Food safety procedures for preparing, transporting, storing and serving field trip meals
- Temperature controls
- Handwashing and proper food handling procedures
- Food safety documentation procedures

Day of service:

Include written POS meal count instructions for field trip staff with the delivery of the field trip meals.

Attach reimbursable meal signage on the transport containers to help field trip staff identify the required meal components.

Attach temperature logs to the transport containers indicating safe temperatures.

Helpful Resources

[Iowa State Field Trip Standard Operating Procedures for Field Trips](#)

[ICN Standard Operating Procedure for Serving Ready to Eat Foods](#)

[ICN Grab and Go Recipes](#)

[USDA Maintaining Integrity of Meals Served outside the Classroom](#)

Regulatory Reference

[USDA Memo SP 17-2025 Reimbursement for Off Site Meal Consumption](#)

[7 CFR 210.10](#) Meal Requirements for Lunches

[7 CFR 220.8](#) Meal Requirements for Breakfasts

[7 CFR 210.13\(c\)](#) Food Safety Program

[FNS-270-Meal Counting and Claiming Manual](#)

[SP 28-2011 – Revised Water Availability During NSLP Service](#)

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