

CACFP versus SNP: Serving Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs

Preschool students have different nutritional needs than older K-5 students. The updated Child and Adult Care Food Program's (CACFP) meal pattern for preschoolers is specifically designed to meet the nutritional needs of early childhood and help these children develop taste preferences and healthy habits that will last a lifetime. This meal pattern also features smaller portion sizes, which will help reduce food waste from children who cannot finish larger portions.

Comparing Meal Patterns

The following tables compare the CACFP meal pattern for ages 3 to 5 to the School Nutrition Program (SNP) meal pattern for grades kindergarten to fifth grade.

Breakfast	CACFP	SNP
	Preschool Age 3-5 Meal Pattern	K-5 Meal Pattern
Milk	6 fluid ounces	8 fluid ounces
	Must be unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk	Two types must be offered from unflavored low-fat (1%) or unflavored or flavored fat-free (skim)*
Grain	0.5 ounce equivalent	1 ounce equivalent
	One serving per day must be whole-grain rich per day	All grains must be whole-grain rich
Meat/ Meat Alternate	Optional as substitution for grain component up to 3 times per week	Optional in addition to grain component
Vegetable and Fruit	½ cup fruit and/or veg	1 cup fruit and/or veg
	Pasteurized 100% juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day	No more than half of weekly offerings can be in the form of 100% fruit juice
Offer Versus Serve (OVS)	OVS cannot be served when serving preschoolers	OVS optional
	Must serve all three components (grain or M/MA, fruit/veg, and milk) for a reimbursable meal	Students must select three food items, including at least ½ cup fruit, from at least four food items that meet the required food components for a reimbursable meal

Lunch

CACFP Preschool Age 3-5 Meal Pattern

SNP K-5 Meal Pattern

Milk	6 fluid ounces	8 fluid ounces
	Must be unflavored low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk	Two types must be offered from unflavored low-fat (1%) or unflavored or flavored fat-free (skim)*
Grain	0.5 ounce equivalent	1 ounce equivalent
	One serving must be whole-grain rich per day	All grains must be whole-grain rich
Meat/ Meat Alternate	1.5 ounce equivalents	1 ounce equivalent
Vegetable and Fruit	¼ cup veg + ¼ cup veg OR fruit	½ cup fruit + ¼ cup veg
	When two vegetables are served at lunch, two different kinds of vegetables must be served	Larger amounts of fruits and vegetables may be served
	Pasteurized 100% juice may only be served at one meal, including snack, per day	No more than half of weekly offerings can be in the form of 100% fruit juice
Offer Versus Serve	Offer versus serve cannot be served when serving preschoolers	OVS optional
	Must serve all five meal components for a reimbursable meal	All five required food components must be offered in at least the minimum required amounts. Students must take at least three meal components, with one selection being at least ½ cup of fruit or vegetable, for a reimbursable meal

*Interim Final Rule for SY 2018-2019 for offering flavored 1% milk in the School Nutrition Programs. If co-mingled, pre-school age children may also be offered 1% flavored milk.

For more detailed information on the requirements of the CACFP and SNP meal patterns see MDE's [Meal Pattern](https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/FNS/SNP/qual/pat/) page at <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/FNS/SNP/qual/pat/>

Implementing the CACFP Age 3-5 Meal Pattern

School Food Authorities (SFAs) can alter their existing SNP to accommodate the CACFP meal pattern and simplify the operation of serving the proper meal pattern to both preschoolers and school-aged students. Here are some tips for success when utilizing both meal patterns:

- Since there are no maximum serving sizes, preschoolers may be served the larger SNP portion sizes. Keep in mind that the daily requirement for meat/meat alternate at lunch is actually higher in the CACFP than the SNP meal pattern (1.5- vs. 1-ounce equivalents).
- Reduce costs and variety of inventory by selecting items that meet both meal patterns. This may include:
 - Serving preschoolers the 8 ounce milk cartons instead of purchasing a separate 6 ounce milk carton
 - Serving all students yogurt that meet the CACFP sugar limit of less than 23 grams of sugar per 6 ounce serving
 - Serving all students cereals that meet the CACFP sugar limits of less than 6 grams of sugar per dry ounce
 - Note: all WIC-approved cereals meet this criteria
 - Serving preschool students all whole-grain rich grains (that meet SNP criteria) even though CACFP only requires one grain serving per day to be whole-grain rich

However, keep in mind these specific qualifications of the CACFP meal pattern:

- Full-strength, pasteurized 100% juice can only be served one time per day
- Grain-based desserts are not creditable; however, sweet crackers, quick breads and muffins are allowed
- Deep-fat frying is not allowed for on-site food preparation for preschoolers
- Offer vs. Serve cannot be used when serving preschoolers
- Schools that provide catered/vended meals to early care centers must follow the new CACFP meal pattern rules

The Co-Mingling Flexibility

Due to potential logistical or operational challenges, School Food Authorities (SFAs) participating in the School Nutrition Programs (SNP) who serve both preschool students and school-aged students may have difficulty providing both meal patterns during the same meal service. If preschoolers are served at the same time and location as school-aged students (meaning students are co-mingled) and the SFA is unable to implement both meal patterns for the respective grade groups, the SFA may utilize the co-mingling flexibility. This flexibility allows SFAs to serve the SNP's K-5 meal pattern to both preschoolers and school-aged students. The determination to use the co-mingling flexibility must be made for each meal service. For example, students may be co-mingled at breakfast, but separate for lunch or vice-versa.

Deciding Which Meal Pattern to Use

