

Utilizing Offer Versus Serve

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Regulatory Authority: [SP 14-2025](#), [SP 41-2015](#), 7 CFR 220.8(e), 7 CFR 210.10(e)

Response Required: No

Attention: Child Nutrition Directors and Managers

Contact: Courtney Erick

Phone Number: 501-324-9502

Email: Courtney.erick@ade.arkansas.gov

Under the leadership of Secretary Brooke Rollins, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is prioritizing the clarification of statutory, regulatory, and administrative requirements of the school-based programs. To clarify regulations for schools, improve children's participation in school meals, and limit food waste, USDA has issued [SP 14-2025](#), a reminder of the Offer versus Serve (OVS) flexibility. The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance on utilizing the Offer versus Serve (OVS) flexibility when serving kindergarten (K) through twelfth (12) grade students under the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). OVS is a flexibility that allows students to decline food items. The goal of OVS is to reduce food waste and improve menu planning by allowing students to decline food they do not intend to eat. USDA and Arkansas encourage schools to use the OVS flexibility at both breakfast and lunch for students in grade levels K-12 to reduce food waste and enhance student choice.

School Breakfast Program

At breakfast OVS is optional for grades K- 12 but is encouraged. OVS may not be utilized by students in preschool. Schools participating in OVS are required to offer at least four (4) food items from the three required meal components. The items offered must be offered in at least the minimum meal pattern required size as described in [7 CFR 220.8](#). Students may select three food items, including ½ cup of fruit or vegetable.

National School Lunch Program

At lunch OVS, in accordance with 7 CFR 210.10(e) senior high schools (grades 9-12) are required to participate in OVS. Lower-level schools may participate in OVS at the discretion of the school district. OVS may not be utilized by students in preschool. Schools participating in OVS are required to offer all

five (5) components in their required sizes as described in [7 CFR 210.10](#). Students must select three meal components, including ½ cup of fruit or vegetable.

OVS Resources

In order to utilize OVS successfully it is important for students and staff to understand the requirements of a reimbursable meal.

- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Team Nutrition has developed posters and tips sheets to help promote understanding of OVS. These resources may be found [here](#).
- USDA has also created an OVS guidebook to aid child nutrition professionals in understanding OVS. The guidance book may be found [here](#).
- The Arkansas Department of Education, Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, Child Nutrition Unit (ADE, DESE, CNU) has developed meal pattern training, including OVS for child nutrition professionals. These training resources may be found [here](#).
- In your school consider sharing menus and OVS education with teachers, staff, parents and students to promote discussion on what options are available and how to build a reimbursable meal. This could be shared on the district website, through social media, or handouts.
- In your school cafeteria consider adding fruit or vegetables near your point of sale to help ensure all students receive a reimbursable tray without disrupting the serving line.

Contact your Area Specialist via email or at 501-324-9502 for further details.