



Food & Nutrition Services FAQ

Q: *What guidelines does the school lunch and school breakfast programs follow?*

A: Southeast Polk Community District's Food & Nutrition Services participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and National School Breakfast Program (NSBP). The programs are guided and regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture or USDA guidelines. Here is a [fact sheet](#) about the National School Lunch Program. Here is a [fact sheet](#) about the School Breakfast program.

Q: *What items are required to be offered on a daily menu?*

A: The food categories that are offered are regulated by the USDA; however, a lunch offering must consist of the following for all grade levels. We offer additional choices available to students as the move from elementary into the secondary grade levels:

- **Meat/Protein** – Typically the entrée that is offered each day. This can include chicken, pork, beef, eggs, yogurt, cheese, nuts/nut butters and legumes.
- **Whole grains** – This may be the bun that the entrée is served on or the breading that the protein is coated in. There are other forms that the grain may be served in as you will see when looking at our menus posted online.
- **Fruits** – At least 2 fruit choices are offered each day. A variety of fresh whole fruits like apples, oranges, bananas and pears daily.
- **Vegetables** – At least 2 vegetable choices are offered daily. We offer high quality vegetables to all students. We utilize fresh and frozen vegetables. Canned vegetables are used infrequently, mainly when we offer legumes on the menu. Fresh veggies are offered daily. In addition, the junior high and high school have fresh vegetable bars.
- **Milk** – Lowfat (1%) and fat-free options in 8 ounce servings. including white fat-free, 1% white, fat-free chocolate, and fat-free strawberry milk is offered daily. We are not allowed to substitute water, juice or any other beverage for the milk offering; however, water is available to students during the lunch period.

Q. *How are meal choices determined?*

A. We offer many choices to students each day in an effort to serve products that students not only like, but consume. If they do not consume the offerings, we have not succeeded. Our goal is to fuel a student's body and brain! Meal choices are determined due to many factors. We focus on high quality products that students know and like. New items are taste tested with students to determine acceptability. Discussion with students regarding items they want to see on menus is also factored in. It is also necessary to ensure that new products meet the USDA guidelines we must follow. Participation data as well as student and staff feedback is used from the meals served to determine if items will be served again.

The USDA also provides guidance on how we purchase products which also affects choices. We are required to procure (bid) all products (food, supplies, etc) in an effort to get the best quality product for the best price. Requests for proposals for products are submitted to all vendors that can meet the product and service needs. These proposals are evaluated based on many criteria and are awarded to the vendor that offers the best quality service and product at the best price.

Q. *Why do you offer flavored milk?*

A. Based on USDA regulations we must offer milk choices with all meals. Only fat-free white, 1% white and fat-free flavored milks are allowable to be offered. There must be at least 2 varieties of milk offered at both breakfast and lunch. At Southeast Polk CSD, we offer fat-free white, 1% white, fat-free chocolate and fat-free strawberry at all meals, every day of the week. Milk, flavored and white, is a top source of calcium, vitamin D and potassium. Each cup of milk contains 12 grams of natural sugar in the form of lactose. Flavored milk does contain added sugars but on average it contributes only 3% of added sugars to a children's diet. If a student misses a serving of milk at school they are unlikely to make that up at home. Our goal is for students to consume the food and drink they place on their tray at lunch and breakfast which is why we offer choices. If you would prefer your child not to have flavored milk, we encourage you to have that conversation with your children about their choices.

Q. *My child would prefer water at lunch. Why isn't water offered as an option at lunch?*

A. The USDA National School Lunch and National School Breakfast regulations require that milk is offered. We are not allowed to offer any other beverage to replace milk in the meal. Water or juice cannot be offered as part of a reimbursable meal. Your child is welcome to bring a water bottle to lunch but you will need to check with each individual building based on their water bottle policies. By Federal regulations, we must have water available in all cafeterias. Most if not all cafeterias contain drinking fountains that students can access during lunch. If a school does not have a water fountain in the cafeteria, we provide water in an easy accessible container. Students may pick up a cup from the kitchen staff for water.

Q: *Why are desserts not offered on the menu more often?*

A: While we do offer an occasional dessert on the menus we typically don't as it adds less nutrient dense calories to a student's meal. We have a number of calories that we can plan for according to by USDA guidelines. We prefer to have students gain their energy from items that will sustain their attention, appetites and focus throughout the rest of their school day.

Q: *What is included in a meal and not priced as a la carte?*

A. All students receive the same choices for the student meal. Any student may purchase additional items also called a la carte, but must have enough money in their lunch account to pay for the item in full. We do not allow students to charge the purchase of a la carte items to their accounts. The choices student have are outlined below:

- **Breakfast** - Students are required to take 3 items each day, with one of those items being a fruit/fruit juice.
- **Lunch** - Students are required to take at least 3 of the 5 components, but one must be a fruit or a vegetable. Students have a choice of an entrée (meat/protein and grain), fruit, vegetables, and milk. While we want students to make sure they are taking advantage of the full meal, we do ask students to only take what they intent on eating.
- **A la carte** - Extra snack and beverage items that are not included in the student meal such as an additional milk, extra entrée, chips, water bottles, Propel, juices and other beverages and snacks are available.

Q. *Why are the serving sizes so small?*

A. The USDA has set nutritional guidelines that we must meet in relation to food items served as well as a range for total calories, saturated fat, sodium and trans fat offered in each meal. We strive to provide healthy, sufficient and appetizing meals with a variety of choices to meet student preferences while still being compliant the USDA regulations. The USDA Meal Pattern can be accessed [here](#). The Meal Pattern is the driving force behind the serving sizes offered.

Q: *My child does not get enough calories to sustain them during the day from a school meal. They come home hungry every day. How can my child receive a larger portion?*

A: The lunch and breakfast guidelines are structured based on an average sized-child in each grade level. Most children will need a meal or snack approximately every 3-4 hours due to basic metabolism and growth. Students in grades 6 – 12 have the option to purchase an extra entrée, a la carte items and even a whole 2nd meal at an additional cost. We encourage you to talk with your child about their choices and discuss the daily offerings especially the vegetables and fruits. If they are not taking all the items they are offered, encourage your children to try new foods. If students take all the items offered, they will have a well-balanced, satisfying meal. Also depending on the needs of your child, you are always welcome to supplement their calories with other food items and snacks from home while considering building policies.

Q. *My child says they run out of food?*

A. We never run out of food but may run out of your child's preferred choice. We make projections based on what students have chosen before on how much of each item to prepare. This is done at all schools- elementary – high school. We must make projections well before the day of production as we have to order the food in advance. Are our projections always correct? No. Do students follow the same trends for choices from 1 day to the next? No. Our goal is that all students receive the choice of entrée that they had wanted but it does happen that we may run short. There is always food available to them so they can still receive a nutritious and filling meal. As we continue to offer more choices for students, projecting student choices can get tricky to determine even at the elementary level. Even though students at the elementary schools order their entrée choice in the morning, we still find ourselves at times with a shortage of one choice over the other. As you can imagine, a student may change their mind by lunch time and choose the other entrée. We have worked hard to decrease this from happening such as placing a buffer on the amount we prepare, have students bring a ticket for the second choice and students with 2nd choice at the beginning of the line but there is no fool proof way to stop students from switching choices. We are continually looking at our projections at the buildings and striving to have all choices offered from the first student through the line to the last one.

Q. My kids don't have enough time to eat?

A. Meal times are scheduled by each building. The district Wellness Policy (507-10) states that the district will provide each students with at least 10 minutes to eat after sitting down for breakfast and 20 minutes after sitting down for lunch. Our department works to serve all students efficiently so they have the most time possible to sit and enjoy their meal.

Q. My child is allergic to certain foods. What can I do to get them a meal that meets their needs?

A. Food Service Department staff often make accommodations for students meals to fit specific dietary needs. We require a [Diet Modification Request form](#) completed by an Iowa licensed prescribing medical professional (Medical Doctor, Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, Physician's Assistant or Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner). Menus are made to meet students' specific dietary needs.

We also utilize the serving method of "Offer vs Serve", which means we offer all required meal components but students can deny 2 of the 5 items offered at lunch and only take 3 items at breakfast. Students with allergies/intolerances are able to not choose the items they can't eat while choosing the foods they can and enjoy without a special diet menu. Students are not required to take milk and can ask for a cup to fill at the drinking fountain with water.

We are not an allergen free facility and unfortunately cross contamination could occur. Our department is only able to address documented and known diet modifications. There safeguards are in place in preparing meals, however, cross contamination could still occur.

Q. My child is spending a great deal of money daily. Is there any way to limit their spending?

A. Spending limits can be set on all student accounts. You have some choices for restrictions. You are able to block all a la carte purchases or set a daily dollar limit. This can be done by calling the Nutrition office at 515-957-3432. These limits stay on your child's account until you ask for them to be removed. These limitations show up as notifications on the cashier terminals operated by Food Service Staff. Please make sure you have a discussion with your child regarding the limits you have established.

Q. How are the school meal prices determined?

A. School meal prices are determined by a variety of factors and prices as meal. We look at the cost of food/consumables and labor while offering a reasonable price for families. The meal price is also regulated by the USDA which sets a minimum price for paid meals. The USDA also sets reduced meal pricing for those families that qualify. School meals offer a well-balanced, delicious meal for a very reasonable price.

Q. My child said they are now "rescuing" food and "reusing" it. Is the food being reused in the cafeteria?

A. The Food Service department started a Food Rescue program in all elementary buildings this past fall in an effort to reduce food waste. Any food items that are shelf stable, prepackaged and unopened can be "rescued" by being placed in a bin instead of disposing in the trash. These items are not resold but donated to school nurses and counselors to be used in a variety of ways such as dispensing medications, upset tummies, students who missed breakfast, sent home with students in need, etc. Items that can also be get donated to local efforts to feed those in need.

USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

For all other FNS nutrition assistance programs, State or local agencies, and their sub recipients, must post the following Nondiscrimination Statement: In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#), (AD-3027) found online at: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html , and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or

(3) email: program.intake@usda.gov .

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Iowa Nondiscrimination Statement

It is the policy of this CNP provider not to discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, age, or religion in its programs, activities, or employment practices as required by the Iowa Code section 216.6, 216.7, and 216.9. If you have questions or grievances related to compliance with this policy by this CNP Provider, please contact the Iowa Civil Rights Commission, Grimes State Office building, 400 E. 14th St. Des Moines, IA 50319-1004; phone number 515-281-4121, 800-457-4416; website: <https://icrc.iowa.gov/>.

Disclaimer:

The statements of this job description are intended to describe the general nature and level of work being performed by individuals assigned to this job. They are not intended to be an exhaustive list of all responsibilities, duties, and skills required of personnel in this position. These statements are not intended to limit or in any way modify the right of any supervisor to assign, direct, and control the work of employees under his or her supervision.

It is the policy of the Southeast Polk Community School District not to illegally discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, creed, age (for employment), marital status (for programs), genetic information (for employment), sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status (for programs) in its educational programs and its employment practices. There is a grievance procedure for processing complaints of discrimination. If you have questions or a grievance related to this policy please contact, Joseph M. Horton, Associate Superintendent, Affirmative Action Coordinator, Equity Coordinator and Title IX Coordinator, Southeast Polk District Office, 8379 NE University Ave., Pleasant Hill, IA 50327, [\(515\) 967-4294](tel:5159674294), joseph.horton@southeastpolk.org. Inquiries or grievances may also be directed to the Iowa Civil Rights Commission, Des Moines, IA, 50319-0201, [\(515\) 281-4121](tel:5152814121); or the U.S. Department of Education, Region VII Office of Civil Rights, 500 West Madison Street, Suite 1475, Chicago, IL 60661.