



# Offer Versus Serve Fact Sheet for Parents

## **What is a full meal?**

Every day students are offered options for all five components of their lunch, which includes milk, protein, fruits, vegetables, and grains. While the most nutritious lunch contains all of the options, we understand that sometimes our students do not like some of the items we serve. To make our customers happy, we like to give them the option to decline items they do not want to eat. In order to be in compliance with Offer Versus Serve standards set by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), students are required to take at least three components for their meal. One of these must be at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fruit or vegetable.

## **How does my child know what to take?**

All schools are required by USDA guidelines to have adequate signage posted in the cafeteria and on the serving line to help explain how students can create a complete meal.

## **Why did my child only get a breadstick, milk, and an apple for their lunch?**

Although all students are offered five components in the appropriate serving size for their age, your child took the minimum requirements ( three components, with one being at least a  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of a fruit) under Offer Versus Serve. This qualifies as a complete meal according to USDA standards. If you are not aware what options your child had to select for their meal check the monthly lunch menu or contact school food service.

## **Why did one slice of pizza cost more than a whole lunch?**

One slice of pizza does not qualify as a complete meal. This means that the school must charge the student the a la carte price for this item. A la carte prices are different because schools receive federal reimbursement for meals that contain the required food items.



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## **Why doesn't my child have to take a milk with their meal?**

While students are encouraged to take milk, they are allowed to decline this component if they choose due to USDA's Offer Versus Serve requirements.

## **Why can't you make my child take more food?**

USDA regulations do not allow schools to tell a student to take more food if there is enough on the tray to make a meal.

## **Why can't my child buy just a breadstick (or a cookie, French fries, etc.) that came with the meal?**

When a student chooses to buy an item for a la carte or seconds, that item must meet specific standards, called [Smart Snacks Standards](#). These standards are set based on the main ingredient, as well as the calorie, sodium, fat, and sugar content. Schools must follow these guidelines when selling items to students, therefore it is likely that the item the student is trying to buy does not meet the proper standards.

## **Why are my elementary and high school student's menus the exact same, but my high schooler is paying more?**

While it may appear that an elementary-aged student and high school-aged student are receiving the same meal, the portion sizes they are receiving are different. The meal pattern set by USDA requires that each grade group (K-5, 6-8, 9-12) receives a certain amount of each component each day and throughout the week. This helps ensure that the meals will meet the nutritional needs of the differing ages in schools.