



FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL STUDENT NUTRITION MEALS

Topic: USDA & State Standards

At Alamogordo Public Schools, the well-being of our students is of utmost importance, and one aspect we are dedicated to is ensuring that our students receive healthy and nutritious meals. We wanted to take a moment to share some key information about the school nutrition program, including recent changes and important guidelines set by the USDA.

As of school year 2023-24 in the state of New Mexico, the Governor signed the SB4 bill allowing all students to receive a free breakfast and a free lunch regardless of household income.

The 2023/24 school year has seen a shift in our cafeteria approach to an "offer versus serve" model, providing students with more choices and flexibility in their meal selections. We believe this not only encourages healthier eating habits but also minimizes food waste. What is offer versus serve? Offer versus serve is when all 5 components (protein, grain, fruit, vegetable, and milk) are offered but a student is only required to take 3 items as long as one item is half a cup of fruit or vegetable. A student may only be seen with 3 items on their tray but that is what that student chose, not what was offered. Here is a brief overview of what our school nutrition program entails at different grade levels:

Elementary Schools:

- Students have a choice of two hot items, two vegetables, and two or more fruits, one of which is always fresh.

Middle Schools:

- Students are offered four daily choices, including two hot items and a salad or sub sandwich.
- Like elementary levels, middle school students can choose from two vegetables and two or more fruits.

High School:

- The high school features a food court environment with a variety of choices to cater to diverse preferences.

In addition to these offerings, we want to highlight some important USDA guidelines that guide our menu planning:

1. **Share Table:** Each cafeteria has a "share table" where students can place unwanted items for others to take, reducing food waste. These items must be unopened.
2. **Sodium Intake:** The USDA mandates limited sodium intake based on grade levels to promote healthier eating habits.
3. **Whole Grain Requirements:** 80% of grain per week is required to be whole grain, including items like tortillas, bread, and pasta.
4. **Calorie Limits:** Maximum calorie limits are set for different grade levels, and no added oils or butter are permitted.
5. **Vegetable Variety:** Menus must include specific amounts of dark green, red/orange, beans and peas (legumes), starchy, and other vegetables per week.
6. **Milk:** Low-fat milk is required, and flavored options are permitted.

While these guidelines contribute to the overall health of our students, we acknowledge that the change in food flavor might be noticeable. We understand that healthy does not always mean the most flavorful, that is why we have been evaluating the option of a Spiceology station at each school that would provide a variety of no-sodium herbs and spices that students would be able to add to their meal. We appreciate your understanding as we continue to provide nutritious meals that align with the USDA and State guidelines.

The Student Nutrition Department remains committed to offering healthy, scratch-cooked meals. We are dedicated to reviewing and revising our menus to stay in compliance with USDA guidelines while also ensuring our students enjoy the meals provided. We appreciate your partnership in fostering a healthy and thriving school environment.

This information is part of a series that will be provided to our community on APS Student Nutrition.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to our Student Nutrition Department at (575)-812-6085, vanessa.chacon@alamogordoschools.org or sandra.davis@alamogordoschools.org

Thank you for your ongoing support.

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