

HealthierUS School Challenge for Elementary Schools

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Application Procedures

1. Is it possible to apply for the HealthierUS School Challenge (HUSSC) as a district, instead of as an individual school?

Yes, multiple schools can apply under the same district. However, each individual school must submit its own application packet, **except**

A. If the same menu and same foods were served throughout the district, the district can submit only one set of 4-week lunch menus, one set of menu worksheets and recipes.

B. If the same competitive foods and beverages were sold throughout the cafeteria and/or school campus, submit only one set of the competitive foods worksheet.

C. If an individual school follows its district's wellness policy, submit only one school policies and practices checklist.

2. If schools apply for a Gold award and do not meet the criteria, but do meet the criteria for the Silver or Bronze, will they be given the HUSSC award for the lower level?

Yes, if they did not meet the *Gold of Distinction* or *Gold* requirements, their application would be reviewed against the *Silver* and *Bronze* criteria.

3. If my school had a three day week scheduled (the minimum), but one day was cancelled due to inclement weather, can we still use that week since they had the planned menu?

No, schools should submit four consecutive weeks with at least three days of served meals each week. If this is not possible due to unusual circumstances, work with your State Agency and Regional Office.

4. How do we demonstrate we have healthy menu planning practices?

Healthy menu planning practices should be implemented throughout the menu. Ideally, entrée choices should appeal to students, incorporate whole grain products, and offer a variety of fruits and vegetables on the serving line or salad bar. The use of token items, such as a loaf of whole wheat bread/rolls offered at the end of the serving line, but not menued as part of the meal or offering a food item that no one takes so the school only prepares a few of the item, does not support the HUSSC vision. Every student should have the opportunity to select a reimbursable lunch that meets the HUSSC criteria.

5. How can I find out if my school is already enrolled as a Team Nutrition (TN) School? If my school is not a TN School, how do I apply?

Go to <http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/database.html>. Select the search page hyperlink and enter the school's zip code to determine if the school is listed in the TN School Database.

The TN school enrollment form can be downloaded online and submitted only by mail or fax. Signatures of the principal and foodservice manager are required in order to process the enrollment form.

6. Why must the State agency child nutrition director sign off on each application?

By signing off on an application, the State director assures USDA that the application has been thoroughly reviewed by the State agency and that the school is meeting all HUSSC criteria and is serving reimbursable meals according to 7 CFR 210.10.

7. Will a school be asked to submit additional documentation after it submitted its application?

Possibly. FNS reserves the right to request additional information to verify that the school: (1) serves reimbursable meals, and (2) meets all HUSSC criteria. The menu structure should be fully explained in question 2 on pages 4, 5, 6, and 7 (Lunch Menu Worksheet) of the HUSSC application and should include information on entrée choices, side dish choices, number of choices the student can choose, and how Offer vs Serve (OVS) is implemented, if applicable. The review process can be significantly delayed if additional information is needed.

8. What information should the production records include?

Production records should be submitted for the 4-week lunch menus. They should indicate actual daily meal count (students and adults); menu items (used to meet meal pattern requirements), planned portion size (by age/grade); quantity prepared for each menu item, a la carte sold (if applicable), and leftovers.

Menu Criteria

9. What is the basis for the menu criteria for school lunches?

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* serves as the basis for the menu criteria for school lunches. The menu criteria emphasize the same foods that are encouraged in the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines*. Some of these foods include whole grains, dark green and orange vegetables, fruits, dry beans and peas, and low-fat/fat-free milk.

10. Can we provide 2 weeks of menus from one month and then 2 weeks from the next month?

Yes, as long as the weeks are consecutive. The weeks do not have to be confined within the same calendar month.

11. If the menu weeks used are shorter than 5 days, do we still have to meet the same menu criteria as those schools that are using 5 days in the weeks?

Yes. Requirements to meet the menu criteria are not prorated for less than 5 days in the week. Whether you have 3, 4, or 5 days in the week, each day should reflect the menu criteria. For example, if you have a 3-day week for a school that is applying for a *Silver/Bronze* award, they would have to offer whole-grain foods and dark green/orange vegetables all 3 days for that 3-day week. For vegetables and fruits, you must offer a different choice each day.

12. What is meant by the statement that “each child should have the opportunity to select a meal that supports the HealthierUS School Challenge goals?”

This statement is best explained with an example: School XYZ allows students to select only one side dish from the following options: spinach salad, baked beans, and corn. The spinach salad is used to meet the dark green/orange vegetable criteria and the baked beans to meet the weekly dry beans/peas criteria. Since the student can only select one side, he/she would not be able to select both the spinach salad and the baked beans and, therefore, would not have the opportunity to select a meal that supports the HUSSC goals.

Fruits/Vegetables

13. Why is there a requirement to offer dry beans or peas at least once per week?

The *Dietary Guidelines* emphasize more dry beans and peas (legumes) because they provide a broad array of vitamins, minerals, and macronutrients, including those that are nutrients of concern. They are also a great economical source of dietary fiber and plant protein. These products can be purchased in the dry form and cooked at the school, or purchased as canned, pre-cooked. A variety of dry beans/peas are available through the USDA Foods program. They can be served as a meat/meat alternate or as a vegetable, and may be incorporated into entrees, side dishes or salad bars. *Note that fresh, canned or frozen green peas, fresh or frozen soybeans (edamame), and green lima beans, which have a very different nutrition profile do not count as dry beans or peas.*

14. Why is there a requirement for fresh fruits in the menu criteria?

It is important that menus reflect a variety in the types and forms of fruits that are offered, including fresh fruits. The *Dietary Guidelines* encourages consuming more fruit. Fresh fruits provide fiber and an array of micronutrients including vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals. Also, schools have opportunities to offer fruit to students throughout the school year that are predominately available fresh, such as melons, bananas, strawberries, kiwi, oranges, and grapes, which increases the number of potential fruit choices.

15. Can 100% fruit or vegetable juice count as a serving of fruit or vegetable for HUSSC?

Yes, if the serving size is at least ¼ cup, schools may offer 100% fruit juice once per week to count toward the HUSSC criteria for fruit. Similarly, 100% vegetable juice may count once per week as a vegetable serving. Note that 100% fruit or vegetable juice may count toward only ½ of the total fruit/vegetable requirement in Traditional or Enhanced Food Based Menu Planning. See the Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs, page 2-1.

16. What vegetables are included in the “dark green” vegetable subgroup? Can we use dark green or orange vegetables that are not on the list?

“Dark Green Vegetables” include dark green leafy vegetables and broccoli. In addition to broccoli, vegetables in this subgroup include spinach, romaine lettuce, collard greens, kale, and turnip greens. Dark green leafy vegetables and broccoli are sources of important vitamins and minerals such as vitamins A, C, and E, folate, calcium, iron, and potassium. Orange vegetables include acorn squash, butternut squash, carrots, hubbard squash, pumpkin, and sweet potatoes. You can only count dark green or orange vegetables that are on the HUSSC list.

17. Can schools offer a salad bar every day of the week to meet the HUSSC criteria for vegetables and fruits?

Yes. Schools that offer salad bars usually offer a variety of vegetables and fruits. As long as the planned serving size is at least ¼ cup for each fruit and vegetable selected, and the required number and kind of fruits or vegetables are offered, schools may count the salad bar toward meeting the criteria.

18. If a school is counting fruits and vegetables from a self-served salad bar where the foods are not pre-portioned, how is it determined if they are meeting the ¼ cup requirement?

The menu planner defines what the typical serving is from the salad bar, based on actual student consumption. The production records show sufficient quantities are planned.

19. What is meant by “a different vegetable and fruit every day”?

In keeping with the *Dietary Guidelines*, HUSSC encourages schools to offer a wide variety of vegetables and fruits, so that a student can select a different one every day, not merely different forms of the same vegetable or fruit. For example, if a school offers mashed potatoes, it cannot also count a serving of potato rounds that same week to meet the HUSSC criteria. Apple slices and applesauce also are considered as the same fruit. Schools that offer a variety of individual fruits or vegetables throughout the week may count a mixture of these as a serving in order to minimize waste.

20. Can baked beans count as both a vegetable serving and the weekly dry bean/pea requirement for the Challenge?

Yes, they can meet the dry bean and pea and the vegetable requirement for the HUSSC.

21. When several vegetables or fruits are in 1 dish (e.g., a California Medley or Fruit Salad), can this dish meet the requirement of the HUSSC vegetable or fruit criteria?

Yes, in dishes such as a California Medley, where more than one vegetable is used, one of the single vegetables in the dish can be used to meet the vegetable criteria for HUSSC. For example, the broccoli in the California Medley would meet the dark green vegetable criteria.

Whole Grains

22. How can I determine if a whole grain product credits as a serving of grain/bread?

Schools should compare the weight of one serving of the bread/grain in ounces or grams with the weights listed in the charts on p. 3-15 and 3-16 in the Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs.

23. How do you determine if the whole grain is the primary ingredient by weight in a grains/breads product?

A whole grain is the primary ingredient by weight when:

- (1) A whole grain is listed first on an ingredient statement, or
- (2) In purchased products that contain multiple grains, if the total weight of all the whole grain ingredients is greater than the weight of the first ingredient listed, then it meets the criteria of whole grains being the primary ingredient by weight.

If a school-made recipe contains multiple whole grains, a total of whole grains weigh more than any other ingredient.

24. If the grains/bread product contains some whole grain, but whole grain is not the primary ingredient by weight, can I still count the product as a whole grain?

Yes. As long as the product equals one grains/bread serving and whole grain(s) is the primary grain ingredient. However, schools must serve a majority of whole grain products in which whole grain is the primary ingredient by weight. (See Question #23)

25. How many times per week must I offer items in which whole grain is the primary ingredient by weight?

To meet the whole grain criteria, schools which apply for a Gold/Gold of Distinction award must offer products in which whole grain is the primary ingredient at least 3 of the 5 required serving days. For Silver/Bronze award, schools must serve these products at least 2 of the 3 required

serving days. Additionally, brown rice, whole-grain pasta, and oatmeal are considered Group A whole grain foods, if they meet the serving size requirement. (See Question #22).

26. Can I offer the same whole grain food item each day?

No, at least one of the weekly servings must be a different whole grain food or product in order to meet the HUSSC criteria. Schools should offer a variety of whole grains each week and over the course of the four weeks. Schools will not meet the HUSSC criteria by offering whole wheat bread as a daily optional whole grain item. Schools are encouraged to use brown rice, whole-grain pasta, whole cornmeal, oatmeal or other cooked whole grains to increase the use of whole grains in schools. A variety of whole grain foods are also available for schools to use through the USDA Foods Program (formerly known as Commodity Foods). Various forms of a grain may be counted as different whole grain foods, such as whole wheat bread, whole wheat rolls, and whole wheat tortillas. Check the whole grains resources on the HUSSC section of the Team Nutrition website.

27. How can my school obtain whole grain USDA Foods (Commodities)?

The USDA Foods Program (which offers commodity foods to schools) is administered at the State level. The State distributing agency selects food items from the USDA foods available list, those foods that they believe will be most popular in the school/child nutrition programs in their state. If you would like to see more whole grain product options, please contact your State distributing agency. A list of State Contacts can be found at www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/contacts/sdacontacts.htm. A list of foods available can be found at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/foods/SY09-schfoods.pdf>.

28. Can flax seed count as a whole grain?

No, flax seed is not a grain. Grains are generally the seeds of various grasses. Flax seed is a seed product of a flowering plant, and is not considered a grain product.

29. Can popcorn meet the whole grain requirement?

No, while popcorn is a whole grain, it is considered a snack food item and is not credited as a grain/bread in the USDA Food Buying Guide. Popcorn will not count toward the HUSSC whole grain criteria even if it is served as an extra item of the reimbursable meal.

30. If the ingredient label lists “whole corn treated with lime” as an ingredient, would the whole corn ingredient still be considered a whole grain?

The product would only be considered a whole grain if documentation from the manufacturer indicates that the manufacturing process used to prepare the corn with lime retains the pericarp, or bran layer.

Milk

31. Can flavored fluid milk be offered?

Yes. Low-fat (1% or less) and fat-free (skim), flavored or unflavored milk can be offered.

Nutrition Education and Physical Activity Criteria

32. What are the nutrition education criteria?

- a) Nutrition education is provided to at least half of the grade levels in the school;
- b) Healthy eating messages and activities are integrated into existing classroom instruction such as health education, science, language arts, reading and writing classes. This type of instruction should include the use of *MyPyramid* and *MyPyramid for Kids* lessons, other Team Nutrition materials or their equivalent. You can download MyPyramid lessons at: <http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/Resources/mypyramidclassroom.html>,
- c) Nutrition education activities involve the classroom, cafeteria, and home/parents.

33. What are the physical education/activity criteria?

- a) Structured physical education classes are provided to students throughout the school year. These classes count toward the time requirements;
- b) In addition, physical activity opportunities are provided daily for students outside of Physical Education class. For example, regular scheduled recess, physical activity breaks during the school day within the classroom, school walking clubs, bike clubs, intramural sports, walk to school program, etc. This does not count toward the time requirements for physical education.

Criteria for Competitive Foods and Beverages (Including a la carte and/or vended items)

34. What is the basis for the competitive foods criteria?

The HUSSC criteria reflect the recommendations of the 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and the Institute of Medicine (IOM) published recommendations (April 2007) for foods that

should be served in schools, outside of the organized school lunch meals. Competitive foods criteria emphasize limiting the intake of foods high in saturated fat, *trans* fat, added sugars and sodium.

35. Do these criteria eliminate selling whole milk and 2% milk either a la carte and/or through school vending? Why?

Yes. The *2005 Dietary Guidelines* specifies that Americans (age 2 and older) should use fat-free and low-fat milk and milk products.

36. Why was a 200 calorie limit put on portions of items for vended sale?

A 200-calorie limit was placed upon pre-packaged vended or a la carte sales in an effort to control portion size and thus calories. Additionally, schools that prepare foods for a la carte sales are required to limit the portion to the serving size of the food served in the National School Lunch Program.

37. Can my school offer an entrée as a la carte item if it is not offered as part of the lunch menu that day?

Yes. However, the entrée would have to meet the HUSSC Competitive Foods criteria. For example, if pizza is sold a la carte, but is not offered as an NSLP entrée on that day, the pizza would have to meet the criteria for fat, *trans*-fat, saturated fat, sugar, sodium and portion size/calories.

38. If my school uses Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP), what serving sizes do I need to use in order to meet the competitive food portion size criteria?

For NSMP, the serving size is defined by the menu planner based on the planned meal. If a school sells a second entrée a la carte, that entrée is exempt from meeting the competitive foods criteria and the portion size of the second entree must be the same or smaller than the serving size offered in the school lunch program. Any a la carte items that are not part of a reimbursable meal must meet the competitive foods criteria.

39. If my school meets all of the Gold award criteria and only sells low-fat or fat-free milk a la carte, does my school qualify for a Gold Award of Distinction?

Yes. By selling only milk a la carte, the school meets the competitive foods criteria of the Gold Award of Distinction award. Schools do not need to meet both the Competitive Foods criteria and the Physical Education criteria to qualify for the Gold Award of Distinction.

40. Do beverages have to meet the sugar criteria?

No. Only low-fat or fat-free milk, 100% juice, and water can be sold as competitive beverages in order to meet any of the HUSSC award levels. These beverages are exempt from the sugar criteria.

41. Does the Gold/Gold Award of Distinction competitive foods criteria address only items sold by the school, or does this include other school sponsored activity sales?

The Gold/Gold Award of Distinction criteria include all foods and beverages made available at the school, to students on the school campus, and throughout the school day. Examples of food and beverage sales/service that would require meeting the nutrition guidelines or standards are:

- Foods or beverages sold a la carte in the school cafeteria
- Foods or beverages sold in vending machines, school stores, or snack bars operated by the school
- School-sponsored food and beverage sales during the school day

42. Do the foods served at birthday parties or other classroom events have to meet the Challenge criteria?

No. Schools are not expected to monitor what a parent sends to school for a birthday party. However, schools may have policies on birthday parties/classroom events as part of their school wellness policies.

43. Do the food items sold at a fundraiser after school have to meet the competitive foods criteria? Why or why not?

No, the food items sold at an afterschool fundraiser do not have to meet the competitive foods criteria. The competitive foods criteria only apply to school-sponsored food and beverages sold during the school day. For creative ideas related to fundraising, see the *Healthy Fundraising Tips* resource included in the HUSSC Application Kit.

Participation Criteria

44. Why was the school lunch average daily participation (ADP) criteria set at 70 percent for Silver and both Gold applications?

Data from the *School Nutrition Dietary Assessment (SNDA) Study II* (July 2001) indicated that the average daily participation, based upon enrollment, of elementary schools randomly selected for this national study was 67%. The SNDA Study III (November 2007) showed that average daily participation of elementary schools has improved to 73%. An elementary school that is

being nationally recognized as having an excellent school nutrition program is expected to have an average daily participation rate of at least 70 percent.

45. Our school has a low percentage of students approved for free and reduced meals, thus our participation is low. Will USDA make allowances for lowering the ADP for such schools?

No. The USDA school meals programs are for all children, not just those qualifying for free or reduced-price meals. USDA believes that any school recognized as having excellence in nutrition should exceed the national average of school lunch participation. Meals that are planned and prepared to meet quality standards should be appealing to all children in the school. For helpful ideas to increase participation, see *Tips for Improving Participation* included in the HUSSC Application Kit.

46. Do we need to use a specific month for reporting our ADP?

No. You can report your ADP for any month prior to the date the submitted menus are served.

47. In my school, kindergarten students do not stay for lunch. Must I include these students in my enrollment in order to calculate my ADP?

No. If school lunch is not accessible or available for kindergartners, do not count them in the participation data.

[Recognition](#)

48. What type of recognition will schools receive if they receive the Gold Award of Distinction, Gold, Silver or Bronze award?

Schools that successfully meet the Challenge will receive a recognition plaque and a banner. In addition, the recognized schools will be listed on the Team Nutrition web site, and may be chosen to be a part of national FNS media events that recognize schools for their leadership and excellent school meals program. Schools are encouraged to market their success to their community via the newspaper, parent newsletters, etc.

[Recordkeeping/Documentation](#)

49. What kind of recordkeeping and/or documentation is required of schools after they have received certification?

Your school must keep copies of the following documents that were submitted with

its application on file during the certification period:

- Menus served
- Menu documentation (including food production records, CN Labels, Nutrition Facts Labels etc.)
- Recipes, if school-made, for products sold/served.
- Nutrition Facts labels for items sold a la carte

50. What is the time period for my award?

Awards are good for a 2-year period, from the date of the FNS approval. Before your award expires, you should apply for recertification. If possible, try for the next award level.