

# SAMPLE SCHOOL LUNCH MENU: QUICK PREP

9-12

## Quick Prep

A quick prep menu features pre-prepared or partially prepared items that require light assembly or minimal hands-on preparation before serving. This approach helps save time and ease kitchen workload compared to speed scratch cooking while still allowing for some on-site preparation. Quick prep menus help districts balance efficiency, flavor, and consistent portions while meeting current USDA standards.

## When it works best:

This menu is ideal for kitchens with limited staff capacity, minimal equipment availability, short meal periods, or high-volume service where speed is critical.



To support school nutrition professionals in preparing for the updated lunch nutrition standards on added sugars and sodium, taking effect in School Year 2027–2028, this sample menu offers practical, compliant menu planning aligned with the new benchmarks. Since January 2026, schools have been able to offer a wider variety of fluid milk options, including whole and reduced-fat milk. This menu demonstrates how higher-fat milk options can be successfully incorporated. Our goal is not only to provide menus that meet USDA requirements, but also to spark excitement and encourage greater student participation in school meal programs.

WEEK 1	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>ENTRÉES</b>	Mac & Cheese Bowl <sup>WG</sup> w/ BBQ Chicken Veggie Burger on a Bun <sup>WG</sup> Turkey, Ham & Cheese Sub Sandwich <sup>WG</sup>	Chicken Burrito Bowl w/ Spanish Brown Rice <sup>WG</sup> Grilled Cheese Sandwich <sup>WG</sup> Chicken Caesar Salad w/ Caesar Dressing	Roasted Chicken w/ Cornbread <sup>WG</sup> Crispy Catfish w/ Cornbread <sup>WG</sup> Seasonal Fruit & Yogurt Parfait <sup>WG</sup>	<i>Pasta Bar:</i> Spaghetti <sup>WG</sup> or Penne Pasta <sup>WG</sup> <i>Choice of Sauce:</i> Marinara Sauce, Alfredo Sauce w/ Chicken Meatballs, or Italian Meat Sauce Served w/ Garlic Bread <sup>WG</sup> Sunbutter Sandwich <sup>WG</sup> w/ String Cheese	Cheese or Pepperoni Pizza <sup>WG</sup> Spicy Chicken Sandwich <sup>WG</sup> <i>Hummus Snack Pack:</i> Hummus, Pita Chips <sup>WG</sup> & Veggies
<b>VEGETABLES</b>	Steamed Broccoli Baby Carrots Lettuce, Tomatoes, & Pickles	Seasoned Pinto Beans Corn Lettuce & Diced Tomatoes	Mashed Potato Steamed Green Beans	Roasted Cauliflower w/ Parmesan Romaine Salad	Lemon Roasted Carrots Cucumber Coins
<b>FRUIT</b>	Green Apple Wedges Frozen Mixed Berry Cup	Bananas Grapes	Orange Wedges Cinnamon Applesauce	Fresh Pears Honeydew Melon & Grapes	Red Apple Wedges Raisins
<b>MILK</b>	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*
<b>CONDIMENTS</b>	Ranch Dressing, Ketchup, Mustard, Mayo	Salsa, Sour Cream, Shredded Cheddar Cheese	Ketchup, BBQ Sauce, Tarter Sauce	Ranch Dressing	Ranch Dressing
<b>WEIGHTED AVERAGE</b>	693 kcal	807 kcal	830 kcal	772 kcal	665 kcal

WG = Whole Grain | Vegetable Sub-Groups: Dark Green, Red/Orange, Starchy, Legume, Other | \*Unflavored milk options

DIETARY SPECIFICATIONS AVERAGE FOR WEEK 1	9-12 Menu Average	9-12 Target
<b>CALORIES (KCAL)</b>	753	750 min / 850 max
<b>SATURATED FAT (% OF TOTAL CALORIES)</b> <i>Milk sat fat is excluded from analysis</i>	7.8%	< 10%
<b>ADDED SUGARS (% OF TOTAL CALORIES)</b>	5.3%	< 10% (by July 1, 2027)
<b>SODIUM (MG)</b>	1,073	< 1,080 (by July 1, 2027)

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WEEK 2	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<b>ENTRÉES</b>	Scrambled Eggs & Waffles <sup>WG</sup> Chicken Biscuit Sandwich <sup>WG</sup> Turkey & Cheese Wrap <sup>WG</sup>	Fish Tacos <sup>WG</sup> w/ Mango Salsa & Brown Rice <sup>WG</sup> Chicken Street Tacos <sup>WG</sup> w/ Salsa & Brown Rice <sup>WG</sup> Cobb Salad w/ Ranch Dressing	Orange Chicken w/ Fried Brown Rice <sup>WG</sup> Korean Beef Bowl w/ Fried Brown Rice <sup>WG</sup> Strawberry Smoothie w/ Graham Crackers <sup>WG</sup>	<u>Potato Bar:</u> Baked Potato w/ Choice of Toppings: Cheese, Chicken, Chili Cheese Lasagna <sup>WG</sup> Sunbutter Sandwich <sup>WG</sup> w/ String Cheese	Crispy Baked Chicken w/ Dinner Roll <sup>WG</sup> Hamburger on a Bun <sup>WG</sup> <u>Protein Bento Box:</u> Hard Boiled Egg, Cheese, Apple Wedges, Cucumber Coins, & Crackers <sup>WG</sup>
<b>VEGETABLES</b>	Roasted Redskin Potatoes Cherry Tomatoes	Seasoned Black Beans Cucumber Coins w/ Tajin	Edamame Baby Carrots	Steamed Broccoli Romaine Salad	Sweet Potato Fries Lettuce, Tomatoes, & Pickles
<b>FRUIT</b>	Green Apple Wedges Frozen Mixed Berry Cup	Bananas Grapes	Orange Wedges Cinnamon Applesauce	Fresh Pears Honeydew Melon & Grapes	Red Apple Wedges Raisins
<b>MILK</b>	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*
<b>CONDIMENTS</b>	Syrup, Ranch Dressing, Ketchup, Mustard, Mayo	Salsa, Sour Cream, Ranch Dressing	Ranch Dressing	Ranch Dressing	Ketchup, Mustard, Mayo
<b>WEIGHTED AVERAGE</b>	787 kcal	861 kcal	714 kcal	772 kcal	708 kcal

WG = Whole Grain | Vegetable Sub-Groups: Dark Green, Red/Orange, Starchy, Legume, Other | \*Unflavored milk options

DIETARY SPECIFICATIONS AVERAGE FOR WEEK 2	9-12 Menu Average	9-12 Target
<b>CALORIES (KCAL)</b>	769	750 min / 850 max
<b>SATURATED FAT (% OF TOTAL CALORIES)</b> <i>Milk sat fat is excluded from analysis</i>	5.8%	< 10%
<b>ADDED SUGARS (% OF TOTAL CALORIES)</b>	5.0%	< 10% (by July 1, 2027)
<b>SODIUM (MG)</b>	1,079	< 1,080 (by July 1, 2027)



## Menu Planning Tips

### OFFER BUILD-YOUR-OWN (BYO) BOWLS

Boost choice and participation; easily supports vegetarian options.

### VARY PROTEINS

Rotate flavors and styles (roasted, crispy, spicy, global cuisines).

### USE USDA FOODS

Add variety with items like catfish or frozen fruit cups.

### BREAKFAST FOR LUNCH

Great Monday option; popular with all ages.

### FRIDAY SNACK PACKS

Convenient, grab-and-go for busy students.

### KEEP SIDES COLORFUL

Rotate fruits/veggies and use seasonal options for appeal and value.

### PAIR SIDES SMARTLY

Combine simple items to create new dishes.

### ENHANCE FRUIT APPEAL

Use berries or premium fruits as garnishes.

### START WEEK WITH FROZEN FRUIT

Helps bridge gaps before fresh deliveries.

### USE DRIED FRUIT

No added sugar; helps reduce end-of-week waste.

## EXPANDED MILK OPTIONS

When schools offer milk options students recognize and enjoy, they are more likely to drink it and waste less, helping them to meet their daily nutrition needs to support their growth and development. Here are three key things to know about higher-fat milk options:

### 1) WHOLE AND REDUCED-FAT MILK AND HEALTHY WEIGHT IN CHILDREN

A growing body of research indicates that whole and reduced-fat milk are not associated with increased risk of overweight or obesity in children. Several studies have found neutral or even beneficial associations with body composition and cardiometabolic health.<sup>1-5</sup>

### 2) THE DAIRY MATRIX HELPS EXPLAIN THE UNIQUENESS OF DAIRY FOODS ACROSS FAT LEVELS

Whole milk is often characterized by its saturated fat content (i.e., 5 g per serving). However, saturated fat in dairy foods is complex and includes a diverse array of over 400 unique fatty acids—including short-, medium-, branched- and odd-chain fatty acids—that have been linked with health benefits for satiety, gut health and body composition.<sup>6-9</sup> Dietary fat plays an important role in childhood growth by helping support energy needs, brain development and absorption of fat-soluble vitamins.<sup>10</sup>

### 3) OFFERING MILK KIDS ENJOY MAY IMPROVE NUTRIENT INTAKE

Taste and familiarity play an important role in children's food choices. Consumer research shows that whole and reduced-fat milk are the most purchased milk types in U.S. households, indicating that many children already consume them at home.<sup>11</sup> Data also show that whole milk represents a larger share of milk purchases among Black, Asian and acculturated Hispanic households, with this preference especially pronounced in households with children.<sup>12</sup>

#### Keeping Milk Cold & Safe

##### STORAGE

Maintain milk at ~35°F in walk-in or milk box cooler.

##### SERVICE BEST PRACTICES

Serve between 35–40°F, minimize cooler door openings, and ensure proper airflow. Keep milk in the cooler during service; do not place it outside the cooler.

##### TEMPERATURE CHECKS

Use digital thermometers and maintain logs.

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