

SAMPLE SCHOOL LUNCH MENU: QUICK PREP

K-8

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
ENTRÉES	Mac & Cheese Bowl ^{WG} w/ BBQ Chicken Turkey, Ham & Cheese Sub Sandwich ^{WG}	Chicken Burrito Bowl w/ Spanish Brown Rice ^{WG} Chicken Caesar Salad w/ Caesar Dressing	Roasted Chicken w/ Cornbread ^{WG} Seasonal Fruit & Yogurt Parfait ^{WG}	Spaghetti ^{WG} w/ Italian Meat Sauce & Garlic Bread ^{WG} Sunbutter Sandwich ^{WG} w/ String Cheese	Cheese or Pepperoni Pizza ^{WG} <i>Hummus Snack Pack: Hummus, Pita Chips^{WG} & Veggies</i>
VEGETABLES	Steamed Broccoli Baby Carrots Lettuce, Tomatoes, & Pickles	Seasoned Pinto Beans Corn Lettuce & Diced Tomatoes	Potato Wedges Steamed Green Beans	Roasted Cauliflower w/ Parmesan Romaine Salad	Lemon Roasted Carrots Cucumber Coins
FRUIT	Green Apple Wedges Frozen Mixed Berry Cup	Bananas Grapes	Orange Wedges Cinnamon Applesauce	Fresh Pears Honeydew Melon & Grapes	Red Apple Wedges Raisins
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*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*
CONDIMENTS	Ranch Dressing, Mustard, Mayo	Salsa, Sour Cream	Ketchup	Ranch Dressing	Ranch Dressing
WEIGHTED AVERAGE	559 kcal	656 kcal	734 kcal	682 kcal	562 kcal

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

DIETARY SPECIFICATIONS AVERAGE FOR WEEK 1	K-8 Menu Average	K-8 Target
CALORIES (KCAL)	639	600 min / 650 max
SATURATED FAT (% OF TOTAL CALORIES) <i>Milk sat fat is excluded from analysis</i>	8.1%	< 10%
ADDED SUGARS (% OF TOTAL CALORIES)	5.0%	< 10% (by July 1, 2027)
SODIUM (MG)	919	< 935 (by July 1, 2027)

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WEEK 2	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
ENTRÉES	Crispy Baked Chicken w/ Dinner Roll ^{WG} Turkey & Cheese Wrap ^{WG}	Fish Tacos ^{WG} w/ Mango Salsa Cobb Salad w/ Ranch Dressing	Orange Chicken w/ Fried Brown Rice ^{WG} Strawberry Smoothie w/ Graham Crackers ^{WG}	Penne Pasta Alfredo ^{WG} w/ Chicken Meatballs Sunbutter Sandwich ^{WG} w/ String Cheese	Hamburger on a Bun ^{WG} <u>Protein Bento Box:</u> Hard Boiled Egg, Cheese, Apple Wedges, Cucumber Coins, & Crackers ^{WG}
VEGETABLES	Mashed Potatoes Steamed Green Beans Lettuce, Tomatoes, & Pickles	Seasoned Black Beans Cucumber Coins w/ Tajin	Edamame Baby Carrots	Roasted Broccoli Cherry Tomatoes	Sweet Potato Fries Romaine Salad Lettuce, Tomatoes, & Pickles
FRUIT	Green Apple Wedges Frozen Mixed Berry Cup	Bananas Grapes	Orange Wedges Cinnamon Applesauce	Fresh Pears Honeydew Melon & Grapes	Red Apple Wedges Raisins
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*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*
CONDIMENTS	Ketchup, BBQ Sauce, Gravy	Salsa, Sour Cream, Ranch Dressing	Ranch Dressing	Ranch Dressing	Ketchup, Mustard, Mayo
WEIGHTED AVERAGE	609 kcal	631 kcal	536 kcal	703 kcal	563 kcal

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

DIETARY SPECIFICATIONS AVERAGE FOR WEEK 2	K-8 Menu Average	K-8 Target
CALORIES (KCAL)	608	600 min / 650 max
SATURATED FAT (% OF TOTAL CALORIES) <i>Milk sat fat is excluded from analysis</i>	6.6%	< 10%
ADDED SUGARS (% OF TOTAL CALORIES)	5.1%	< 10% (by July 1, 2027)
SODIUM (MG)	832	< 935 (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.

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WEEK 3	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
ENTRÉES	Scrambled Eggs & Waffles ^{WG} Turkey, Ham & Cheese Sub Sandwich ^{WG}	Chipotle Chicken Street Tacos ^{WG} Chef Salad w/ Ranch Dressing	Korean Beef Bowl w/ Brown Rice ^{WG} Seasonal Fruit & Yogurt Parfait ^{WG}	Cheese Lasagna ^{WG} w/ Garlic Bread Stick ^{WG} Sunbutter Sandwich ^{WG} w/ String Cheese	Grilled Chicken Sandwich on a Bun ^{WG} Pepperoni Pizza Bistro Box ^{WG}
VEGETABLES	Roasted Redskin Potatoes Cucumber Coins	Seasoned Pinto Beans Lettuce & Diced Tomatoes	Steamed Broccoli Cherry Tomatoes	Steamed Green Beans Romaine Salad	Corn Celery Sticks & Baby Carrots
FRUIT	Green Apple Wedges Frozen Mixed Berry Cup	Bananas Grapes	Orange Wedges Cinnamon Applesauce	Fresh Pears Honeydew Melon & Grapes	Red Apple Wedges Raisins
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*	Whole Milk* 1% Chocolate Milk 1% Lactose-free Milk*
CONDIMENTS	Syrup, Mustard, Mayo, Ranch Dressing	Salsa, Sour Cream, Ranch Dressing	Ranch Dressing	Ranch Dressing	Ketchup, Mustard, Mayo
WEIGHTED AVERAGE	556 kcal	627 kcal	631 kcal	698 kcal	545 kcal

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

DIETARY SPECIFICATIONS AVERAGE FOR WEEK 3	K-8 Menu Average	K-8 Target
CALORIES (KCAL)	612	600 min / 650 max
SATURATED FAT (% OF TOTAL CALORIES) <i>Milk sat fat is excluded from analysis</i>	4.2%	< 10%
ADDED SUGARS (% OF TOTAL CALORIES)	6.3%	< 10% (by July 1, 2027)
SODIUM (MG)	897	< 935 (by July 1, 2027)



Menu Planning Tips

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.¹⁻⁵

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.⁶⁻⁹ Dietary fat plays an important role in childhood growth by helping support energy needs, brain development and absorption of fat-soluble vitamins.¹⁰

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.¹¹ 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.¹²

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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