

## **Wallingford Food Service Department** **Offer vs. Serve**

Congress first adopted Offer vs. Serve (OVS) in 1975 for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Under the OVS provision, students may decline up to two of the five required food items offered in the reimbursable lunch. By offering food choices, students are more likely to eat the food items selected rather than throw them away. There are many benefits to OVS. It reduces plate waste, and thereby reduces disposal costs. It also affects purchasing and allows the school district to keep the cost of meals reasonably priced for parents. More students may purchase lunches resulting in increased revenue for the school. It increases the consumption of fruits and vegetables because children get to choose what they like. Fewer students may bring their lunch, which can result in less packaging waste.

Under the OVS provision, the school meal must be priced (for the paid or reduced price categories) as a unit. This means that one price is established for a complete reimbursable meal in the paid meal category and one price is established for a complete reimbursable meal in the reduced price meal category. Regardless of the number of the items the students select, they must pay the established unit price for a reimbursable meal. The five items offered for a reimbursable meal are meat/meat alternate, grain, vegetable, fruit, and milk. A student must select a minimum of three (3) of the five (5) items offered for the meal to be sold at the unitized price.

The choice of which food items to select is strictly the student's decision. Schools cannot specify which food items a student must select. However, if the menu has a combination food such as pizza that contains, for example, 3 of the 5 required food items for the NSLP, the student must select the pizza if there are not enough additional items available to select a reimbursable lunch.

Students must take full servings of the food items selected to count toward a reimbursable meal. Students may take smaller portions of any food item; however, the smaller portions do not count towards a reimbursable meal unless their combined total meets the required component serving size. For example, if there are 2 vegetables being offered in a meal, if smaller portions of each vegetable total 1 required serving, then the smaller portions would count towards the reimbursable meal. Students may decline any item, including the entrée or milk.