

AT A GLANCE

CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS: Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Final Rule

THE ISSUE

School nutrition professionals have worked tirelessly throughout the pandemic to feed children in their communities. USDA is committed to providing them the support they need to successfully operate the school meal programs. The Child Nutrition Programs: Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains, and Sodium Final Rule will serve as a bridge to transition from where we are now to where we're going – helping schools build back from the uncertainty caused by both the pandemic and several legislative and administrative changes over the past several years so they can continue to provide kids with high-quality, nutritious meals that support their health and development.



THE BACKGROUND

In 2012, USDA updated school meal requirements, including revising nutrition standards to reflect the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs) at that time. This included increasing fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; adjusting requirements for milk; reducing sodium; and setting calorie standards.

Many schools implemented the updated nutrition standards very successfully. Kids' Healthy Eating Index scores – a measure of how closely diets reflect the DGAs – jumped, and research showed children received their healthiest meals of the day at school.

However, legislative and administrative actions delayed full implementation of the requirements for milk, whole grains, and sodium. Further, the pandemic caused major disruptions to the school meal programs, while highlighting the critical role schools play in ensuring kids are well fed.

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This new rule establishes standards for milk, whole grains, and sodium for school years 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 to give schools time to transition in the short term. Meanwhile, USDA is working to develop long-term nutrition standards - based on the newest DGA and extensive input from a wide range of partners - that will work for schools, families, and industry alike. USDA expects to publish a proposed rule on the updated standards in fall 2022.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES



MILK

Schools and child care providers may offer flavored, low-fat milk (1%) in addition to unflavored, low-fat milk and flavored or unflavored nonfat milk¹.



SODIUM

The weekly sodium limit for school lunch and breakfast will remain at the current level, known as Target 1, for school year 2022-2023. For school lunch only, the limit will decrease marginally (10%) in school year 2023-2024 to put schools on an achievable path toward long-term sodium reduction, which will be addressed in future rulemaking.



WHOLE GRAINS

At least 80% of the grains served in school lunch and breakfast per week must be whole grain-rich (containing at least 50% whole grains).

¹For consistency, this standard applies to the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program (ages 6 and up), and Special Milk Program (ages 6 and up).