

HealthierUS School Challenge

Criteria and Instructions for Elementary Schools

Updated October, 2007

Obesity is a growing concern for school children in the United States. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) believes that schools should be taking a leadership role in helping students learn to make healthy eating and active lifestyle choices. Many schools have already made changes to their school nutrition environments, improved the quality of the foods served, and now provide students with more nutritious, healthy choices. The HealthierUS School Challenge certification recognizes your school's commitment to the health and well being of your students.

Elementary schools that meet the HealthierUS School Challenge criteria may apply for either a *Bronze*, *Silver* or *Gold* award. The award is for the current school year (the year of approval) plus the following two school years. Schools are encouraged to continue their commitment and reapply at the end of their award period.

CERTIFICATION PROCEDURES

Certification begins with a self-assessment. A local review panel *must* be established to review your school against the HealthierUS School Challenge criteria. This panel must include, at a minimum, your school's foodservice manager; the school's Team Nutrition Leader; the school's principal or administrator; the School Food Authority's (school district's) foodservice director¹; a representative from the school's parent organization; and at least one member from the following group: school nurse, coordinated school health representative, physical education teacher, or classroom teacher.

SUBMISSION OF THE APPLICATION PACKET

Following the local review, submit the application to the State agency that administers the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) in your State. The Packet includes:

- Application Cover Sheet
- Application Check-off Sheet
- Application Form (two pages)
- Prior month's menu for reimbursable school lunches in your school. *The menu submitted must reflect actual meals served for four consecutive weeks. Any substitutions from the planned menu must be documented. When a month does not have four full weeks, a minimum of 16 days in the four weeks must be submitted. There may be no fewer than 3 days in a week.*
- Lunch Menu Criteria Worksheet (*Bronze/Silver* or *Gold*)
- Nutrition Education Criteria Worksheet
- Physical Activity Criteria Worksheet

¹ USDA recognizes that in small independent schools, the foodservice manager, the Team Nutrition Leader, and/or the foodservice director may be the same person. Please note on the signature line(s) if this occurs in your school.

Note: Documentation of foods served, by the inclusion of recipes, ingredient statements, and/or Nutrition Facts labels, will help to speed your application approval.

APPROVAL PROCESS

The State agency will confirm:

- ✓ The school is enrolled as a Team Nutrition school. The school's enrollment can be verified at <http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/database.html>
- ✓ A School Meals Initiative (SMI) review of your district's School Food Authority (SFA) was completed within the preceding 5 years; the SFA has completed all improvement activities agreed to in the corrective action plan; and has no outstanding Coordinated Review Effort (CRE) audit issues or claims.
- ✓ The submitted menus from your school were reimbursable meals that were served and met the menu criteria for either the *Gold, Silver or Bronze* certification.
- ✓ The written description of nutrition education activities at the school meets the criteria.
- ✓ The written description of opportunities for physical activity meets the criteria.
- ✓ The student Average Daily Participation for your school has been reported correctly and meets the criteria.
- ✓ The foods or beverages sold/served a la carte, in vending machines, school stores, snack bars, etc. in your school meet the criteria for recognition. The school's local review panel must review and certify that the criteria have been met. Documentation of the items sold/served must be maintained at the school during the certification period (2 years) for possible review by the State agency and/or FNS.

The school is required to keep a copy of the signed application and documentation as originals will not be returned.

After the State agency has completed its review of the Application Packet, a representative from the State agency will approve/disapprove, sign and date the application. If approved, it will be submitted, along with the required documentation, to the FNS Regional Office. If disapproved, it will be returned to the school's contact person with an explanation. Incomplete applications may be completed and resubmitted.

CRITERIA FOR CERTIFICATION

1. Your school is enrolled or must enroll as a Team Nutrition (TN) School.

To enroll as a Team Nutrition School or to verify your school's enrollment in Team Nutrition, go to <http://teammnutrition.usda.gov/database.html>

2. Your school offers reimbursable school lunches that meet the USDA nutrition standards.

The School Food Authority (school district) that administers the NSLP for your school must have undergone an SMI review within 5 years preceding your school's application for certification. The State agency will verify that all of the improvement activities planned as a result of the SMI review have been achieved. If the SFA did not receive an SMI review within the preceding 5 years and your school wants to apply for a *Bronze*, *Silver* or *Gold* certification, the school food authority may request from the State agency that an SMI review be scheduled as soon as possible.

- 3. Your school offers reimbursable school lunches that demonstrate healthy menu planning practices and principles of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, and meet or exceed the menu criteria listed in the chart on the next page. The menus must reflect the actual meals that were served.**

In order to facilitate a speedy review process, please include recipes, ingredient statements, and/or Nutrition Facts labels to support the information provided. For example, "wheat bread" on the menu may not demonstrate that the product's primary ingredient is whole wheat. An ingredient label would clarify whether the food meets the HealthierUS School Challenge whole grain criteria.

Note: For each day, and each menu criteria, *a child must have the opportunity to select a meal that meets all the criteria.* For example, if there are two separate menus, or menu items, offered as a choice, and one is used to meet the vitamin C requirement, the same menu, or menu item, must also be used to meet the other requirements. Meeting the criteria with some foods from one meal and some foods from the other is not acceptable. Remember, a child must have the opportunity to select all the HealthierUS School Challenge foods from a reimbursable meal.

Menu Criteria—Lunch

Bronze and Silver Criteria	Additional Gold Criteria	Clarification
Three different fruits and five different vegetables offered each week		At least 1 vegetable must be offered each day. Juice (fruit or vegetable) may only be counted 2 times a week.
Dark green or orange vegetable or fruit offered three or more times per week		Examples of dark green/orange fruits and vegetables are provided in Food/nutrient guidance, Attachment A. Juice (fruit or vegetable) may only be counted twice per week.
Fresh fruits or raw vegetables offered three or more days of the week	Fresh fruits or raw vegetables offered every day of the week	
Good source of Vitamin C offered each day.		Food/nutrient guidance attachment B-1 and B-2 should be used for determining nutrients in specific serving sizes. Every child must have the opportunity to select food(s) containing 8 mg. or more of vitamin C. Juice (fruit or vegetable) may only be counted twice per week. Salad bar and/or fruit or vegetable items may be combined to meet the vitamin C source requirement. List items offered on the salad bar and the planned serving size for the salad bar.
Four different entrees or meat/meat alternates are offered throughout each week.		When daily choices are not offered, higher fat entrée items are limited to once per week. When choices are offered, a student must be able to select a lower fat entrée each day. A higher fat entrée is defined as having $\geq 40\%$ of calories from fat, excluding nuts, seeds, and nut butters. A definition and examples of different entrees or meat/meat alternates is provided in food/nutrient guidance attachment C.
Cooked legumes (dried beans or peas)—one or more servings offered each week		Examples of legumes (dried beans and peas) are provided in Food/nutrient guidance Attachment D.
Whole-grain foods offered three or more times a week.	Whole-grain foods offered every day of the week.	A whole grain food is one with a whole grain as the <i>primary</i> grain ingredient. Examples of a whole grain ingredient include the terms “whole wheat flour,” “entire wheat flour,” “cracked wheat,” “graham flour,” “brown rice,” “old-fashioned oatmeal,” “quick-cooking oats,” and “whole corn.”. See Attachment E for whole grain products to meet the HealthierUS School Challenge. Submit ingredient statements, documentation and/or recipes for whole-grain products.
Two or more sources of iron offered daily		Food/nutrient guidance attachment F-1 should be used for determining serving sizes. Every child must have the opportunity to select 2 sources of iron from the day’s menu. One item may count as 2 sources if it has 1.6 mg or more of iron.
Low fat (1%) and/or skim (nonfat) milk offered daily.		

To demonstrate that the menus meet either the *Bronze, Silver or Gold* criteria, submit the prior month's menus with portion sizes listed. The menu must contain four weeks, for meals already served.

To assist reviewers in determining if the menus meet the lunch menu criteria, please complete the **Lunch Menu Worksheet** (*Bronze/Silver or Gold*) in the Application Packet, and submit it along with your month's menus and the necessary documentation.

4. Nutrition education is provided to students in multiple grades of your school and meets or exceeds the criteria listed below:

- Nutrition education is provided for at least half, but no fewer than two, of the grade levels in your school. If your school consists of a single grade, nutrition education is provided to all students in the school. In your written description, document that the students in a single grade school will be provided with nutrition education in at least one other grade as they complete elementary school.
- Nutrition education is delivered as part of a structured and systematic unit of instruction.
- Nutrition education involves multiple channels of communication—at least classrooms, school cafeteria, and home/parents—for each grade to which it's provided.

Complete the **Nutrition Education Worksheet**, included in your Application Packet.

5. The opportunity for physical activity is provided to students in every grade of your school, except kindergarten, and meets or exceeds the following criterion.

Physical education classes or the equivalent must be provided on a regularly scheduled basis each school week during the entire school year. Examples of equivalents include school walking clubs, bike clubs, intramural sports, walk-to-school programs, approval of community physical activity programs for academic credit, etc. The objective is to ensure that children are routinely encouraged to be physically active in your school.

Complete the **Physical Activity Worksheet** included in your Application Packet.

6. A student Average Daily Participation (ADP) of 70% of school enrollment or higher is maintained for reimbursable lunches² for a *Silver or Gold* award, or 62%-69% for *Bronze*.

The percent Average Daily Participation (ADP) of school enrollment is calculated by dividing the total student participation for a typical operating month by the number of

² The average daily participation in elementary schools, based on enrollment, included in a national sample of schools for a target week from the *School Nutrition Dietary Assessment Study II* (July 2001) was 67%.

operating days in that month, then dividing by the school enrollment, and multiplying by 100. A typical month of operation to use is October.

For example:

During the month of October, the school served 20,000 reimbursable lunches. It operated or served lunches 20 days. There were 1,200 students enrolled in October. $20,000 \div 20 = 1,000$. $1,000 \div 1,200 = 0.83 \times 100 = 83\%$ ADP

FOR BRONZE or SILVER CERTIFICATION

7 (a) *During meal periods in the foodservice area, your school does not sell/serve foods or beverages in competition with reimbursable meals.*

OR

(b) *During meal periods in the foodservice area, your school sells/serves only these foods and beverages (listed in the chart below) in competition with reimbursable meals.*

To meet the criteria noted in 7 (b) above, if your school sells *any* foods or beverages during meal service, either a la carte, in vending machines, in school snack stores, etc., the item(s) must meet the criteria in the following chart. It is possible that an item may be served as part of a reimbursable meal but not meet the criteria for a la carte and vended items³.

FOR GOLD CERTIFICATION

- 1. The criteria of 1 through 6 above must be met, and additionally items 2 and 3 below must be met.**
- 2. Your school lunch menus for reimbursable lunches also offer a fresh fruit or raw vegetable, and a whole grain food each school day.**
- 3. (a) *Throughout the school day (including meal periods) and throughout the school campus, your school does not sell/serve foods or beverages other than reimbursable meals).* Self-explanatory.**

OR

(b) *Throughout the school day (including meal periods) and throughout the school campus, your school sells/serves only the following foods or beverages other than reimbursable meals:*

³ All foods in reimbursable meals are planned so that the menus meet the nutrition standards for calories, calories from fat and saturated fat, and key nutrients over a school week, appropriate to age/grade levels. This requires a balance of lowfat foods, foods rich in nutrients, etc. to meet the weekly nutrition standards. In contrast, foods and beverages sold on an individual or a la carte basis have not been nutritionally averaged into the weekly planned menus. Therefore they must be able to “stand alone” on established nutritional criteria.

To meet the criteria above, if your school sells *any* foods or beverages during meal service, either a la carte, in vending machines, in school snack stores, etc., the item(s) must meet the criteria in the following chart. It is possible that an item may be served as part of a reimbursable meal but not meet the criteria for a la carte and vended items³. Refer to the *Criteria for Sales/Service of A La Carte and/or Vended Items* chart below.

Food or Beverage	Criteria for Sales/Service of A La Carte and/or Vended Items These criteria focus on decreasing fat and added sugar, increasing nutrient density, and moderating portion size
Fruits and Non-Fried Vegetables	Fruits and vegetables may be fresh, frozen, canned, or dried, and they must be found in Chapter 2 of the Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov/FBG/2003FBG/%20Section%202.pdf
Approved Beverages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced fat (2%), lowfat (1%), skim/nonfat fluid milk meeting State and local standards for pasteurized fluid milk and/or USDA approved alternative dairy beverages⁴; • 100% full strength fruit and vegetable juices; and • Water (non-flavored, non-sweetened, <i>and</i> non-carbonated)
Any Other Individual Food Sales/Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calories from total fat must be at or below 35%, <i>excluding nuts, seeds, and nut butters</i>. This is determined by dividing the calories from total fat by the total calories and multiplying by 100. If calories from fat are not available, multiply the grams of fat by 9 to equal calories from fat. • Calories from saturated fat must be at or below 10%. This is determined by dividing the calories from saturated fat by the total calories and multiplying by 100. If calories from saturated fat are not available, multiply grams of saturated fat by 9 to equal calories from saturated fat. • Total sugar must be at or below 35% by weight. This is determined by dividing the grams of sugar by the gram weight of the product and multiplying by 100. This includes both naturally occurring and added sugars. This limit does not include fruits and vegetables as defined above. • Portion sizes for a la carte sales in the school cafeteria are not to exceed the serving size of the food served in the NSLP/SBP; for other sales, the item package or container is not to exceed 200 calories.

Meal period is defined as the time from the beginning of the school's scheduled meal service until the end of the scheduled meal service, or until the last student is served, whichever comes last.

Food Service Area refers to any area on school premises where program meals are either served and/or eaten.

⁴ There are no USDA approved alternative dairy beverages at this time. Public Law 108-265 (Child Nutrition Program Reauthorization) authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to establish nutritionally equivalent non-dairy beverages by July 1, 2005. Please check with your State agency for further clarification.

CONTACT INFORMATION

On page 4 of the application, please provide the name and contact information of someone at your school in case there is a question during the review process.

RECOGNITION

After the application has received final approval, your school will be recognized by USDA in the following ways:

- Receiving a plaque and banner that recognizes the school's achievement.
- Posting of the school's name and certification status on USDA's Team Nutrition website.

During the certification period, your school must keep on file copies of the following documentation:

- Your completed and signed Application Packet and attachments.
- Food production records that support the menus submitted.
- Nutrition Facts labels, or recipes if school-made, for products sold/served a la carte or vended in the school.