



# BALANCED MENUS

SCORING GUIDE

# SURVEY GUIDANCE - SCHOOL MEAL HEALTHFULNESS SURVEY

This purpose of this document is to help local campaign leaders to **accurately and consistently fill out the School Meal Healthfulness Survey** and to reduce confusion and variation in the tool's implementation. This guide will walk you through the entire survey, question by question. Please consult this document while you fill out the survey to achieve the highest quality data collection. Thank you! If you have outstanding questions after reading this document, please email [info@balanced.org](mailto:info@balanced.org)

With respect to the question, "Is this facility a participant in the National School Lunch and/or Breakfast Programs?": Usually, a quick Google search can help you determine whether or not a school or school district participates in the NSLB and/or SBP. Having this information will be helpful in answering questions throughout the survey.

## Sections

1. Grains
2. Vegetables
3. Fruits
4. Proteins
5. Milk/Dairy
6. Balance

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## Grains

**Question 1** - The answer to this question is almost certainly “No.” Schools that participate in the NSLP generally serve “whole grain rich” products, which are at least 51% whole grain. Unless the menu clearly indicates that “whole grain” means “100% whole grain,” then it is best to assume that anything labeled “whole grain” or “WG” is referring to whole grain rich rather than 100% whole grain.

**Question 2** - If the school or school district participates in NSLP/SBP, then the answer to this question is “Yes” because it most likely serves whole grain rich products only.

If a school is not a participant in NSLP, then it does not have to follow this federal mandate. Such a school might still serve 100% whole grain products, but this is only the case if the menu contains the words “100% whole grain,” “100% whole wheat,” “brown rice,” or “corn / corn on the cob.” Note that oats are also 100% whole grain, although this is more pertinent for breakfast items.

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## Vegetables

*Note that this section is very unlikely to apply to any breakfast menu, but go ahead and score it like a regular lunch or dinner menu. However, breakfast menus will ultimately be scored differently.*

**Question 3** - Dark green vegetables include: Broccoli, spinach, kale, collard greens, mustard greens, turnip greens, romaine, watercress, dark green leafy lettuce, escarole, endive

**Question 4** - Red/orange vegetables include: tomato and tomato products, pumpkin, carrots, red peppers, sweet potato, acorn squash, butternut squash, hubbard squash.

Note that words like “marina,” “pasta bake,” “baked penne,” “lasagna,” and other pastas that likely include tomato products count toward the red/orange group. Similarly, chili generally contains tomato products and often legumes as well. For this survey, we will not count pizza toward red/orange vegetable.

**Question 5** - Starchy vegetables include: potatoes (baked forms, wedges, and “home fries”) and green peas. Note this does not include sweet potatoes.

**Question 6** - Legumes are dry beans and peas, such as: black, pinto, kidney, chickpea/garbanzo, hummus, white beans, black-eyed peas, split peas, lentils, soy/edamame, etc. Here, we are counting hummus and refried beans as legumes. Note that peanut butter is also technically a legume although it can also be classified as a nut butter.

**Question 7** - In counting the two vegetables per meal, include both vegetables as sides and vegetables within the main entree item. Does not include salad bar.

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## Fruits

**Question 8** - Any form: fresh, canned, dried. Does not include fruit juice of any kind.

**Question 9** - The menu must use the word "fresh."

## Proteins

**Question 10** - Red meats include: all beef, pork, and lamb products. Processed meats include: chicken nuggets, chicken patties, chicken fingers, breaded poultry products, all types of sausage and wurst, pepperoni, deli meats, hot dogs, corn dogs, bacon, and fish sticks.

**Question 11** - Note the "N/A" answer choice.

**Question 12** - Ensure that every single day of the month, meatless meals as offered. Does not include salad bar.

**Question 13** - Ensure that warm/hot meatless meals are offered at least 4 days per week on average.

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**Question 14** - A PB&J sandwich, served with a vegetable, will technically count as a “Yes” for this question, however, if this is the only plant-based option ever offered, select “No.”

*Note that this question will likely be a “No” for breakfast menus, but go ahead and score it as you would for lunch and dinner. If you’re scoring the menu of an exceptional school and the breakfast menu offers plant-based options that include 100% whole grains, fresh fruit, and a plant-derived milk, then that deserves the credit of a “Yes.”*

**Question 15**- Examples of portion sizes include: “beef burger (¼ lb.)”, “3 oz. chicken nuggets”, etc.

## Milk

**Question 16** - Select “Yes” if the menu states that only 1% (low-fat) and fat-free (skim) milks are available. Otherwise, select “No.”

**Question 17** - If you answered “Yes” to question 16, select the “N/A” option. If you answered “No” to question 16, select “Yes” if the menu states that only 1% (low-fat), fat-free (skim), and flavored milks are available. If the menu indicates that whole milk is offered, select “No.”

**Question 18** - This question is straightforward.

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## Balance

**Question 19** - Plant proteins include legumes, nut and seed butters, tofu, and, to some extent, whole grains and vegetables. If meatless meals and a legume or nut (in some form) are offered every day, then the answer might be “Yes” as long as there aren’t tons of meat- and dairy-containing options. In some cases, a larger school or school district will offer a diversity of plant-based protein options but still offer many more animal protein-based meal options.

**Question 20** - This can be tricky and a bit subjective, especially since it’s difficult to gauge the portion sizes of the meal components. However, if there **isn’t a lack of fruit and veggie options**, and **if meatless meals are offered every day**, then that’s a reasonable basis to say that half of the total food volume is made up of vegetables and fruits.