

Summary of Connecticut Nutrition Standards for School Years 2023-24 and 2024-25

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) developed the Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CNS) in response to [Section 10-215e](#) of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S), which required the CSDE to publish nutrition standards for foods offered for sale to students separately from reimbursable meals in public schools, effective with school year 2006-07. This document summarizes the CNS for school years 2023-24 and 2024-25 (July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2025). [Table 8](#) provides some key definitions for the CNS. For detailed guidance on the rationale and implementation guidance for the CNS and a complete glossary, refer to the CSDE's [Connecticut Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools](#).

The general standards and nutrients addressed in the CNS are based on current nutrition science and national health recommendations from the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and national health organizations such as the National Academy of Medicine and American Heart Association. These standards focus on moderating calories; limiting fat, saturated fat, sodium, and sugars; eliminating trans fat; and promoting more nutrient-dense foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat and nonfat dairy products, lean meats, legumes, and nuts and seeds. The CNS meets or exceeds the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) [Smart Snacks nutrition standards](#) for competitive foods (refer to the CSDE's chart, [Comparison of the Connecticut Nutrition Standards and the USDA's Smart Snacks Nutrition Standards](#)).

Public school districts that choose to implement the healthy food option of Healthy Food Certification (HFC) under [C.G.S. Section 10-215f](#) must follow the CNS for 1) all foods sold to students separately from reimbursable school meals, at all times and from all sources on school premises; and 2) all foods served in the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP. Foods sold to students separately from reimbursable school meals include cafeteria a la carte sales, vending machines, school stores, fundraisers, culinary programs, and any other sources of food sales to students.

Food Exemptions

Foods that do not comply with the CNS cannot be sold to students on school premises unless the local board of education or school governing authority votes to allow exemptions and the sales meet the following exemption criteria of the state HFC statute: 1) the sale is in connection with an event occurring after the end of the regular school day or on the weekend; 2) the sale is at the location of the event; and 3) the foods are not sold from a vending machine or school store. For more information, refer to the CSDE's [Exemptions for Foods and Beverages in Public Schools](#) and [Requirements for Competitive Foods in HFC Public Schools](#) and visit the CSDE's [HFC](#) and [CNS](#) webpages.

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Nutrition Standards for Foods

The CNS includes the following six categories of competitive foods: **snacks** (table 2); **entrees sold only a la carte** (table 3); **non-entree combination foods** (table 4); **fruits and vegetables** (table 5); **cooked grains** (table 6); and **soups** (table 7). To be allowed for sale to students, commercial products and foods made from scratch comply with the following CNS requirements: 1) the food must meet at least one general standard (refer to table 1); and 2) the serving with its accompaniments must meet the specific nutrient standards for the applicable food category (refer to tables 2 through 7).

The CNS applies to the amount of the food **as served**, including any added accompaniments such as butter, margarine, cream cheese, jelly, mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard, relish, salad dressing, sauce, and gravy. When a food includes an accompaniment (such as bagels with cream cheese or pancakes with syrup), the nutrition information for both items must be added together prior to reviewing the serving for CNS compliance.

Exempt foods

The following categories of foods are exempt from the CNS general standards and all nutrient standards: 1) **fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables** with no added ingredients except water; 2) **canned fruits** with no added ingredients except water; or that are packed in 100 percent juice, extra light syrup, or light syrup, all without added nonnutritive sweeteners, sugar alcohols, or fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes); and 3) **low sodium/no salt added canned vegetables** with no added fats, nonnutritive sweeteners, or sugar alcohols. These foods are listed in the “Exemptions” column for each food category in table 2. All other foods are not exempt; they must meet at least one CNS general standard and all nutrient standards for the applicable food category.

Prohibited foods and beverages

Two categories of foods and beverages are not allowed even if they meet the CNS or the requirements of the state beverage statute. These include 1) **significantly fortified products** (except for naturally nutrient-rich foods fortified with nutrients at levels based on scientifically documented health needs, such as milk fortified with vitamins A and D); and 2) **products that contain nutrition supplements**, e.g., amino acids, extracts, herbs, or other botanicals. Commercial products may contain the following ingredients when used for color or flavor only: vegetable and fruit extracts (such as pomegranate extract, beet extract, and red cabbage extract) and [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)-approved food colors](#) from natural sources such as spirulina and turmeric extract.

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Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance

The CNS applies to the amount of the food as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, cream cheese, salad dressing, and condiments. Some examples include bagels with cream cheese, tortilla chips with salsa, french fries with ketchup, salad with dressing, and chicken nuggets with dipping sauce. To comply with the CNS: 1) the food must meet at least one general standard; and 2) the serving with its accompaniments must meet the specific nutrient standards for the applicable CNS food category.

Commercial food products

The CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage includes brand-specific lists of commercial food products that comply with the CNS and beverages that comply with the state beverage requirements of C.G.S. [Section 10-221q](#). For more information on how to evaluate commercial products for CNS compliance, refer to the CSDE's [How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#). Districts may submit commercial products to the CSDE for review following the guidance in the CSDE's [Submitting Food and Beverage Products for Approval](#).

Foods made from scratch

Foods made from scratch include two categories: 1) **foods prepared from ingredients using a standardized recipe**, such as entrees sold only a la carte (not as part of reimbursable NSLP and SBP meals) e.g., pizza, chef's salad, lasagna, and sandwiches; soups; cooked grains (such as rice or pasta) with added salt and fat, e.g., oil, margarine, or butter; cooked vegetables with added salt and fat; salad with dressing; fruit smoothies; and baked goods such as muffins and cookies; and 2) **commercial foods with ingredients added after purchasing**, such as popping popcorn kernels in oil and adding salt, making muffins from a mix and adding butter and eggs, and adding sprinkles to commercial frozen cookie dough.

The required CNS documentation for foods made from scratch includes: 1) a standardized recipe that indicates the calories, fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium, and sugars per serving; and 2) the completed CNS worksheet comparing the standardized recipe's nutrition information per serving (including its accompaniments) with the required nutrition standards for the applicable CNS food category (refer to the "[CNS Worksheets](#)" section of the CSDE's CNS webpage). Maintain this documentation on file for the annual HFC documentation (due annually by November 30) and the CSDE's Administrative Review of the school nutrition programs. For additional guidance, refer to the CSDE's [Guidance on Evaluating Recipes for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#) and [How to Evaluate Foods Made from Scratch for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#) and visit the "[Foods Made from Scratch](#)" section of the CSDE's CNS webpage.

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Table 1. CNS General Standards

The food item must meet at least one of the three general standards below.

General Standard 1 – Whole grain-rich (WGR) foods: The food item is a WGR grain product that meets the applicable WGR criteria below. For guidance on what foods belong to each grain group (A-I), refer to the CSDE’s *Grain Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*.

- **Commercial grain products in groups A-G (e.g., breads, muffins, pancakes, and crackers) and group H (e.g., rice, pasta, quinoa, and cooked breakfast cereals like oatmeal):** 1) The product is 100 percent whole grain or contains a blend of whole and enriched grains that is at least 50 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 3.99 grams per portion for groups A-G or 6.99 grams per portion for group H.
- **Ready-to-eat (RTE) breakfast cereals (group I):** 1) The first ingredient is a whole grain and the cereal is fortified or the cereal is 100 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 6.99 grams per portion. For more information, refer to the CSDE’s *Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program*.
- **Commercial combination foods containing a grain portion from groups A-I, e.g., pizza crust in pizza, noodles in lasagna, and breading on chicken nuggets:** 1) The grain portion is 100 percent whole grain or contains a blend of whole and enriched grains that is at least 50 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains in the grain portion do not exceed 3.99 grams per portion for groups A-G or 6.99 grams per portion for groups H-I.

For more information on the WGR requirements and noncreditable grains, refer to the CSDE’s resources, *Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12* and *When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Program*.

General Standard 2 – Food groups: The food item has one of the following food groups as the first ingredient: fruits, vegetables, dairy, or protein foods, e.g., meat, beans, poultry, seafood, eggs, nuts, and seeds. If water is the first ingredient, the second ingredient must be a fruit, vegetable, whole grain, dairy, or protein food.

General Standard 3 – Combination foods: The food item is a combination food that contains at least ¼ cup of fruit and/or vegetable per serving.

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Table 2. Snacks

The snacks category includes snack foods such as chips, crackers, popcorn, rice cakes, hard pretzels, pita chips, snack mix, and trail mix; cookies, cereal bars, and granola bars; bakery items such as brownies, pastries, toaster pastries, muffins, waffles, pancakes, French toast, soft pretzels, and rolls; ice cream, ice cream novelties, and frozen desserts; breakfast cereals, including cold RTE cereals and cooked hot cereals such as oatmeal; nuts and seeds; peanut butter and other nut/seed butters; meat snacks such as jerky and meat sticks; cheese, pudding, and yogurt; and smoothies made with low-fat yogurt and/or fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice.

The standards below apply to the amount of the food item as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, cream cheese, syrup, dips, sauces, and condiments.

Nutrient Standards

- **Calories:** No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Total fat:** No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes.
- **Saturated fat:** Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments.
- **Trans fat:** All products must be 100 percent trans fat free, including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils.

Exemptions

Exemption 1: fat and saturated fat

The following foods are exempt from the fat and saturated fat standards, but cannot contain chemically altered fat substitutes:

- low-fat or reduced fat 100 percent natural cheese (including part-skim mozzarella);
- nuts, seeds, and nut/seed butters (including products that contain small amounts of added fat from processing or roasting);
- products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds with no added sweeteners or fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes); and
- dried seafood with no added fat (exempt from total fat standard but not saturated fat or trans fat standards). **Note:** Regular seafood is in the category of “Entrees sold only a la carte” (refer to [table 3](#)).

All other snack products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards. The fat exemption does not apply to foods that contain cheese, nuts, seeds, nut/seed butters, and dried fruit as an **ingredient**,

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Table 2. Snacks, *continued*

Nutrient Standards	Exemptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Smoothies (made with low-fat yogurt and fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice): No more than 4 grams of total sugars per ounce. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. Portion size is limited to no more than 8 fluid ounces for elementary schools and 12 fluid ounces for middle and high schools. ○ Yogurt and pudding: No more than 4 grams of total sugars per ounce. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. • Sodium: No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments. • Caffeine: No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p>e.g., peanut butter cookies, pecan cookies, granola bars with nuts, cranberry walnut muffin, cheese crackers, cheese sauce, peanut butter crackers, and sesame seed crackers. These foods must meet the fat and saturated fat standards for the CNS snacks category.</p> <p>Exemption 2: sugars The following foods are exempt from the sugars standard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds with no added sweeteners (including nutritive sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, and sugar alcohols) or fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes). • frozen desserts containing only 100 percent juice and/or fruit and no added sweeteners (including nutritive sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, and sugar alcohols) <p>All other snack products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards.</p>

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Table 3. Entrees sold only a la carte

CNS entree categories: Entrees include the three categories of main dish food items below.

1. A combination food of **meat/meat alternate and WGR food**, e.g., breakfast egg sandwich on whole-wheat English muffin, turkey wrap on whole-wheat tortilla, pizza with WGR crust, hamburger on whole-grain bun, and bean burrito with whole-corn tortilla.
2. A combination food of **vegetable/fruit and meat/meat alternate**, e.g., chef’s salad with turkey, cheese and hard-boiled egg, fruit and cheese platter, yogurt and fruit parfait, smoothies made with low-fat yogurt and fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice, baked potato with chili, and chicken vegetable stir-fry.
3. A **meat/meat alternate alone** (e.g., sausage patty, hard-boiled egg, and grilled chicken), excluding yogurt, cheese, nuts and seeds, nut and seed butters, and meat snacks, e.g., beef jerky and meat sticks. These foods must comply with the standards for the snacks category (refer to [table 1](#)).

Note: The entree standards apply **only** to entree items that are **sold only a la carte**, i.e., entrees that are **not** part of a reimbursable meal. Entree items that are sold a la carte during the meal service on the **same day** that they are planned and served as part of reimbursable school meals are exempt from all nutrient standards if they meet the criteria in exemption 1 below.

The standards below apply to the amount of the entree as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, cream cheese, ketchup, mustard, and salad dressing.

Nutrient Standards	Exemptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calories: No more than 350 calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Total fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. 	<p>Exemption 1: entrees as part of reimbursable meals</p> <p>Entree items that are sold a la carte during the meal service on the same day that they are planned and served as part of reimbursable school meals are exempt from the standards if they 1) are the same or smaller portion size as the NSLP and SBP; 2) have the same</p>

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Table 3. Entrees sold only a la carte, *continued*

Nutrient Standards	Exemptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saturated fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Trans fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free, including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. • Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. • Sodium: No more than 480 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments • Caffeine: No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p>accompaniments; 3) meet the trans fat standard; and 4) do not contain nonnutritive sweeteners, sugar alcohols, or chemically altered fat substitutes.</p> <p>This exemption applies only to the three categories of main dish entree items defined by the CNS, i.e., entree items that are sold a la carte during the meal service on the same day that they are planned and sold as part of a reimbursable meal (refer to “CNS entree categories” above). This exemption does not apply to any other meal items that are also sold a la carte such as fruits, vegetables, soups, breads, rice, and pasta.</p> <p>All other non-entree meal items that are sold a la carte are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards. For example, french fries that are part of a reimbursable meal cannot be sold a la carte unless they comply with the CNS for fruits and vegetables (refer to table 5). Muffins that are part of a reimbursable meal cannot be sold a la carte unless they comply with the CNS for snacks (refer to table 1).</p> <p>Exemption 2: fat The following entrees are exempt from the fat standard but not the saturated fat or trans fat standards: seafood with no added fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes); and whole eggs with no added fat. All other entrees are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards unless they meet exemption 1 above.</p>

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Table 4. Non-entree combination foods

This category includes nutrient-rich combination foods that are not entrees, such as WGR vegetable egg rolls, carrot sticks with peanut butter, and vegetables with hummus dip. Foods in this category either do not meet the CNS main dish entree criteria (refer to “[CNS entree categories](#)” in table 3) or do not provide the minimum meal pattern requirements for meat/meat alternates and grains together, or meat/meat alternates alone. **Note:** Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds are evaluated under the snacks category (refer to [table 2](#)).

The standards below apply to the amount of the food item as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, sour cream, ketchup, mustard, and salad dressing

Nutrient Standards	Exemptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calories: No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Total fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. • Saturated fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Trans fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free, including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. • Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. • Sodium: No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments. • Caffeine: No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p style="text-align: center;">None</p>

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Table 5. Fruits and vegetables

This category includes fresh, frozen, canned, and dried fruits (including fruit snacks that are 100 percent fruit) and fresh, frozen, canned, and dried vegetables (including roasted legumes, e.g., roasted chickpeas). **Note:** Products consisting of only dried fruit with nuts and/or seeds are evaluated under the CNS snacks category (refer to [table 2](#)).

The standards below apply to the amount of the food item as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, sour cream, ketchup, mustard, and salad dressing.

Nutrient Standards	Exemptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calories: No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Total fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. • Saturated fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Trans fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free, including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. • Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. • Sodium: No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments. • Caffeine: No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p>Exemption 1: All nutrient standards The following fruit and vegetable products are exempt from all nutrient standards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables with no added ingredients except water; • canned fruits with no added ingredients except water; or that are packed in 100 percent juice, extra light syrup, or light syrup, all without added nonnutritive sweeteners, sugar alcohols, and fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes); and • low sodium/no salt added canned vegetables with no added fats, nonnutritive sweeteners, or sugar alcohols. <p>All other fruit and vegetable products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards.</p>

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Table 5. Fruits and vegetables, *continued*

Nutrient Standards	Exemptions
	<p>Exemption 2: Sugars</p> <p>The following fruit and vegetable products are exempt from the CNS sugars standard:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dried whole fruits or vegetables, dried whole fruit or vegetable pieces, and dehydrated fruits or vegetables all without added sweeteners (including nutritive sweeteners, nonnutritive sweeteners, and sugar alcohols) and fats (including chemically altered fat substitutes). <p>All other fruit and vegetable products are not exempt and must meet all nutrient standards unless they meet exemption 1 above.</p>

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Table 6. Cooked grains

This category includes all cooked grains such as rice, pasta, and quinoa, except for cooked breakfast cereals like oatmeal, which are in the CNS snacks category (refer to [table 2](#)).

The standards below apply to the amount of the food item as served, including any added accompaniments such as butter, oil, mayonnaise, ketchup, mustard, and salad dressing.

Nutrient Standards	Exemptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whole grain-rich (WGR): Cooked grains (group H) must be WGR: 1) the food is 100 percent whole grain or contains a blend of whole and enriched grains that is at least 50 percent whole grain; and 2) noncreditable grains do not exceed 6.99 grams per portion. For more information on the WGR requirements and noncreditable grains, refer to the CSDE’s guide, <i>Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12</i>. • Calories: No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Total fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. • Saturated fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Trans fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free, including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. • Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. • Sodium: No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments. • Caffeine: No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	<p>None</p>

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Table 7. Soups

This category includes all soups, e.g., ready-to-serve, canned, frozen, and rehydrated, and made from scratch.

The standards below apply to the amount of the food item as served, including any added accompaniments such as sour cream, grated cheese, or croutons.

Nutrient Standards	Exemptions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calories: No more than 200 calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Total fat: No more than 35 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. No chemically altered fat substitutes. • Saturated fat: Less than 10 percent of calories as served, including any added accompaniments. • Trans fat: All products must be 100 percent trans fat free, including any added accompaniments. Labels must indicate zero trans fat as served and the ingredients statement cannot contain any partially hydrogenated oils. • Sugars: No more than 35 percent of total sugars by weight and no more than 15 grams of total sugars as served, including any added accompaniments. No nonnutritive sweeteners or sugar alcohols. • Sodium: No more than 200 milligrams as served, including any added accompaniments. • Caffeine: No caffeine except for trace amounts of naturally occurring caffeine-related substances. 	None

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Table 8. Definitions ¹

a la carte sales: Foods and beverages that are sold separately from reimbursable meals in the USDA’s [school nutrition programs](#). Also known as “competitive foods.”

accompaniments: Foods that accompany another food or beverage item, such as butter, cream cheese, syrup, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and salad dressing. Foods must be evaluated for CNS compliance based on the serving including any added accompaniments. Examples include hamburger with ketchup and mustard, bagel with cream cheese, waffles with syrup, WGR pasta with butter, salad with dressing, and fruit crisp with whipped cream.

artificial sweeteners: A category of nonnutritive sweeteners used as sugar substitutes to sweeten foods and beverages. The six artificial sweeteners approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) include 1) acesulfame potassium (Ace-K) (e.g., Sweet One®, Sunett®, and Sweet & Safe®); 2) advantame; 3) aspartame (e.g., Nutrasweet®, Equal®, and Sugar Twin®); 4) neotame (e.g., Newtame®); 5) saccharin (e.g., Sweet and Low®, Sweet Twin®, and Necta Sweet); and 6) sucralose (Splenda®). These nonnutritive sweeteners are calorie-free except for aspartame, which is very low in calories.

chemically altered fat substitutes: Compounds made by chemically manipulating food products to mimic the texture and flavor of fat while providing fewer calories and less metabolizable fat. Examples include olestra (Olean®) and microparticulated whey protein concentrate (Simplese®).

combination foods: Products that contain two or more components representing two or more of the recommended food groups, which include fruits, vegetables, dairy, proteins, or grains. Many combination foods also meet the definition for entrees, e.g., pizza, lasagna, and hamburger on a whole-grain bun.

competitive foods: Any foods and beverages that are available for sale to students anytime on school premises, other than meals served through the USDA’s school nutrition programs. Competitive food sales include, but are not limited to, cafeteria a la carte sales, vending machines, school stores, and fundraisers. Sales of competitive foods include any activity during which currency, tokens, tickets, or similar items are exchanged for foods or beverages.

entrees: A food item that is one of the following three categories of main dish food items: 1) a combination food of meat/meat alternate and WGR food, e.g., breakfast egg sandwich on whole-wheat English muffin, turkey wrap on whole-wheat tortilla, pizza with WGR crust, hamburger on whole-grain bun and bean burrito with whole corn tortilla; 2) a combination food of vegetable/fruit and meat/meat alternate, e.g., chef’s salad with turkey, cheese and egg, fruit and cheese platter, yogurt and fruit parfaits, smoothies made with low-fat yogurt and fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice, baked potato with chili, and chicken vegetable stir-fry; and 3) a meat/meat

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Table 8. Definitions ¹, *continued*

alternate alone (e.g., sausage patty, egg, and grilled chicken), excluding yogurt, low-fat or reduced fat cheese, nuts, seeds, nut/seed butters, and meat snacks, e.g., jerky and meat sticks. 2) low-fat yogurt and fruits/vegetables/100 percent juice, baked potato with chili, and chicken vegetable stir-fry; and 3) a meat/meat alternate alone (e.g., sausage patty, egg, and grilled chicken), excluding yogurt, low-fat or reduced fat cheese, nuts, seeds, nut/seed butters, and meat snacks, e.g., jerky and meat sticks.

nonnutritive sweeteners: Ingredients without calories that are hundreds of times sweeter than sugars and are used as sugar substitutes to sweeten foods and beverages. Nonnutritive sweeteners include the six FDA-approved artificial sweeteners (acesulfame potassium (Ace-K), advantame, aspartame, neotame, saccharin, and sucralose) and three plant-based sweeteners (stevia, monk fruit, and thaumatin) that are [Generally Recognized as Safe \(GRAS\)](#) by the FDA. For more information on nonnutritive sweeteners, refer to “[Additional Information about High-Intensity Sweeteners Permitted for Use in Food in the United States](#)” on the FDA’s webpage.

portion size: The amount of the item as packaged or served. The individual serving size or package cannot exceed 350 calories for entrees or 200 calories for all other foods, including any added accompaniments.

reimbursable school meal: A meal that meets the meal pattern requirements of the USDA’s National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP).

school day: The period from midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the official school day. For example, if school ends at 3:00 p.m., the school day is from midnight to 3:30 p.m. Summer school programs operated by the school governing authority are part of the regular school day.

school premises: All areas of the property under the jurisdiction of the local or regional board of education, the regional vocational-technical school system, or the governing authority district or school.

sugar alcohols (polyols): A type of carbohydrate used as a sugar substitute to sweeten foods and beverages. Sugar alcohols are incompletely absorbed and metabolized by the body and contribute fewer calories than most sugars. They also perform other functions such as adding bulk and texture to foods. Common sugar alcohols include sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol, maltitol, maltitol syrup, lactitol, erythritol, isomalt, and hydrogenated starch hydrolysates (HSH). Products with sugar alcohols are often labeled “sugar free.”

total sugars: All sources of sugars including naturally occurring sugars (e.g., fruits, vegetables, and milk) and added sugars (e.g., brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, glucose, high fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, malt syrup, maltose, molasses, raw sugar, sucrose, sugar, and syrup).

¹ For more definitions, refer to the glossary in the CSDE’s publication, [Connecticut Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools](#).

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Better Choice Recommendations

The Better Choice Recommendations are additional recommendations beyond the CNS requirements. They are listed in the green and white columns on the right of each list on the CSDE's [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage. The Better Choice Recommendations are not required, but help schools identify foods that are even better choices. Foods that meet these recommendations are often less processed and more nutrient-rich.

The Better Choice Recommendations vary for each food category, but generally include the following: no artificial flavors or colors; no high fructose corn syrup; at least 2.5 grams of fiber (a “good” source of fiber as defined by the Food and Drug Administration); and 100 percent whole grain (applies only to products containing grains). The CSDE strongly encourages schools to choose foods that meet these recommendations.

Beverages

The requirements for beverages allowed for sale to students in public schools are separate from the CNS. The beverage requirements are defined by C.G.S. [Section 10-221q](#), and apply to all public schools, regardless of whether the district participates in HFC or the NSLP. Some state beverage requirements are stricter than the Smart Snacks beverage standards. Schools must follow whichever requirements are stricter. For more information on the beverage requirements, refer to the CSDE's [Allowable Beverages in Connecticut Public Schools](#) and [Guide to Competitive Foods in HFC Public Schools](#) and visit the CSDE's [Beverage Requirements](#) webpage.

Resources

Beverage Requirements (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Beverage-Requirements>

Complying with Healthy Food Certification (CSDE training program):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Healthy-Food-Certification/Related-Resources#ComplyingHFC>

Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Connecticut-Nutrition-Standards>

Crediting Breakfast Cereals for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Credit_Cereals_SNP_grades_K-12.pdf

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Evaluating Foods for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards (“How To” section of CSDE’s CNS webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Connecticut-Nutrition-Standards/How-To>

Grain Ounce Equivalents for Grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/Grain_Oz_Eq_SNP_grades_K-12.pdf

Guidance on Evaluating Recipes for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluating_Recipes_CNS_Compliance.pdf

Guide to Competitive Foods in HFC Public Schools (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CompFoods/Competitive_Foods_Guide_HFC.pdf

Healthy Food Certification (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Healthy-Food-Certification>

How to Evaluate Foods Made from Scratch for Compliance with the CNS (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluating_Recipes_CNS_Compliance.pdf

How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the CNS (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Evaluate_Commercial_Food_Products_CNS.pdf

List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/List-of-Acceptable-Foods-and-Beverages>

Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/WGR_Requirement_SNP_grades_K-12.pdf

Requirements for Competitive Foods in HFC Public Schools (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/Requirements_Competitive_Foods_HFC.pdf

Resources for Meeting the Federal and State Requirements for Competitive Foods in Schools (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CompFoods/Resources_Federal_State_Requirements_Competitive_Foods.pdf

Summary Chart: Federal and State Requirements for Competitive Foods in HFC Public Schools (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/CompFoods/Summary_Chart_Requirements_Competitive_Foods_HFC.pdf

When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Program SBP (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Crediting/When_Commercial_Grain_Products_Require_PFS_SNP.pdf

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For more information, visit the CSDE's [HFC](#) and [CNS](#) webpages or contact the [HFC Coordinator](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/HFC/CNS/Connecticut_Nutrition_Standards_Summary.pdf.

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