Comparison of the Milk Component Requirements for the Meal Patterns for School Nutrition Program

School Year 2026-27 (July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027)

This document compares the requirements for the milk component in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool (ages 1-5) in the school nutrition programs, including the updates required by the USDA final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025, and the USDA final rule, *Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs*. The school nutrition programs include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP, Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and Special Milk Program (SMP). The SSO follows the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns.

For information on the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage, Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage, and the "Meal Patterns and Crediting" section of the ASP webpage. For information on the crediting requirements, visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage and Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

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Milk Component

The USDA regulations define different requirements for the milk component in the NSLP, SBP, ASP, and SMP meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool.

- **Grades K-12:** The milk requirements for the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 are defined by the USDA regulations for the NSLP (7 CFR 210), SBP (7 CFR 220), and SMP (7 CFR 215), and the updates required by the USDA final rules, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs*, and the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025.

- **Preschool (ages 1-5):** The milk requirements for the NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns are defined in 7 CFR 210.10(p) (lunch), 7 CFR 220.8(o) (breakfast), and 7 CFR 210.10(o)(3) (snack), and the updates required by the USDA final rules, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and *Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs*. The preschool meal patterns follow the requirements of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) meal patterns for children (7 CFR 226.20).

School food authorities (SFAs) must ensure that all milk offered in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks meets the specific meal pattern requirements for each school nutrition program and grade group.

For information on the meal patterns for the school nutrition programs, visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs webpage, ASP webpage, and Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 webpage. For information on the crediting requirements, visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage and Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

For information on the NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal pattern and crediting requirements, visit the CSDE's Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

For information on the SMP, visit the CSDE's Special Milk Program (SMP) webpage.

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Additional State Requirements for Public Schools

In addition to the USDA meal pattern requirements, milk and nondairy milk substitutes sold to students in public schools must also comply with the state beverage requirements of Section 10-221q of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.). These requirements apply to all milk and nondairy milk substitutes sold as part of and separately from reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks in public schools. For more information, visit the CSDE's Beverage Requirements webpage.



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Comparison Chart for the Milk Component

The chart below compares the milk requirements for the meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool (ages 1-5) in the school nutrition programs.

Requirement	Grades K-12	Preschool (ages 1-5)
Fluid milk	The milk component requires fluid milk as a beverage. Milk does not credit when cooked or baked in foods, such as cereals, puddings, cream sauces, and other foods. Milk must be pasteurized, meet all state and local requirements, and contain vitamins A and D at levels specified by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). **Resources** Milk Component (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage) USDA Memo SP 01-2025: Fluid Milk Requirements for School Meals	Same

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Requirement	Grades K-12	Preschool (ages 1-5)
Fat content	Any fat content allowed: whole, reduced fat (2%), low fat (1%), and fat free. **Resources** NSLP Regulations 7 CFR 210.10(d)(1)(ii): Types of fluid milk: NSLP Regulations 7 CFR 210.10(o)(2): Afterschool snacks served to K through 12 children SBP Regulations 7 CFR 220.8(d): Fluid milk requirements USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs USDA Memo SP 01-2025: Fluid Milk Requirements for School Meals USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025	**Age 1:** Must be whole milk. **Ages 2-5:** Any fat content allowed: whole, reduced fat (2%), low fat (1%), and fat free. **Resources** NSLP Regulations 7 CFR 210.10(d)(1)(ii): Preschooler breakfast meal pattern table NSLP Regulations 7 CFR 210.10(p)(2): Preschooler lunch meal pattern table NSLP Regulations 7 CFR 210.10(o)(3)(ii): Preschooler afterschool snack meal pattern table USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs

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Requirement	Grades K-12	Preschool (ages 1-5)
Flavored milk	Flavored milk cannot exceed the limit for added sugars. **Limit for added sugars in flavored milk:** Flavored milk in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces. Flavored milk sold as a competitive food in middle and high schools cannot exceed 15 grams of added sugars per 12 fluid ounces. **Resources** USDA Memo SP 01-2025: Fluid Milk Requirements for School Meals USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 NSLP Regulations 7 CFR 210.10(o)(2): Afterschool snacks served to K through 12 children NSLP Regulations 7 CFR 210.10(d)(1)(ii): Types of fluid milk SBP Regulations 7 CFR 220.8(d): Fluid milk requirements USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs	**Not applicable:** Milk must be unflavored.

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Requirement	Grades K-12	Preschool (ages 1-5)
Allowable types of milk	Unflavored or flavored whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, and fat-free milk, including lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk, acidified milk, cultured milk, cultured buttermilk, and Ultra High Temperature (UHT). **Additional state requirements for public schools only:** Milk available for sale to students in public schools must also meet the beverage requirements of C.G.S. Section 10-221q (refer to "Additional state milk requirements for public schools" in this chart). **Resources** Beverage Requirements (CSDE webpage) List 16: Milk (CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage) Milk Component (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage) Offering Lactose-Free and Lactose-Reduced Milk in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE) USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs USDA Memo SP 01-2025: Fluid Milk Requirements for School Meals USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025	**Age 1:** Unflavored whole milk, including lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk, acidified milk, cultured milk, cultured buttermilk, and Ultra High Temperature (UHT) milk. **Ages 2-5:** Unflavored whole, reduced-fat, low-fat, and fat-free milk, including lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk, acidified milk, cultured milk, cultured buttermilk, and UHT milk. Breastmilk meets the milk component and may be served in place of fluid milk. **Resources** Beverage Requirements (CSDE webpage) Milk Component (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage) Offering Lactose-Free and Lactose-Reduced Milk in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE) Serving Milk in the CACFP (USDA) USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs USDA Memo CACFP 01-2025: Nutrition Requirements for Fluid Milk and Fluid Milk Substitutions in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, Questions and Answers

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Requirement	Grades K-12	Preschool (ages 1-5)
Additional state milk requirements for public schools	In addition to the USDA's requirements for fluid milk (refer to "Allowable types of milk" in this chart), all milk available for sale to students in public schools must comply with the state beverage requirements of C.G.S. Section 10-221q. Milk cannot contain more than 4 grams of total sugars per ounce and cannot contain artificial sweeteners. These requirements apply to milk sold as part of and separately from reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. Products that meet the federal and state requirements for milk are included on the CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage **Resources** Allowable Beverages for Connecticut Public Schools (CSDE) Beverage Requirements (CSDE webpage) List 16: Milk (CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage)	Same
Milk variety	**NSLP and SBP:** SFAs must serve at least two different choices of allowable milk (refer to "Allowable types of milk" in this chart). At least one choice must be unflavored. **ASP and SMP:** A milk variety is not required. SFAs may serve one type of allowable milk to all children (refer to "Allowable types of milk" in this chart).	A milk variety is not required. SFAs may serve one type of allowable milk to all children.

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Requirement	Grades K-12	Preschool (ages 1-5)
Optional fluid milk substitutes (nondairy beverages) for non-disability reasons	SFAs may choose to offer one or more fluid milk substitutes (nondairy beverages) to all children whose dietary needs do not constitute a disability. Fluid milk substitutes are plant-based beverages like fortified soy milk that are intended to replace cow's milk. Fluid milk substitutes must meet the USDA's nutrition standards for fluid milk substitutes (7 CFR 210.10(d)(2)(ii)). For children whose dietary needs do not constitute a disability, SFAs cannot offer any other beverages (including water and juice) in place of milk for reimbursable meals. **Additional state requirements for public schools only:** Nondairy beverages available for sale to students in public schools must also meet the beverage requirements of C.G.S. Section 10-221q (refer to "Additional state nondairy beverage requirements for public schools in this chart). **Resources** Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE) Identifying Products that Meet the USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE) Guide to Meal Modifications in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE) List 17: Dairy Alternatives (CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages) Milk Substitutes (CSDE's Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage) USDA Memo SP 01-2025: Fluid Milk Requirements for School Meals USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program	Same

Comparison of the Milk Component Requirements for the Meal Patterns for School Nutrition Program

Requirement	Grades K-12	Preschool (ages 1-5)
Additional state nondairy beverage requirements for public schools	In addition to the USDA's requirements for fluid milk substitutes (nondairy beverages) (refer to "Optional fluid milk substitutes (nondairy beverages) for non-disability reasons" in this chart), all nondairy beverages available for sale to students in public schools must meet the beverage requirements of C.G.S. Section 10-221q. Nondairy milk substitutes cannot contain artificial sweeteners and cannot exceed 4 grams of sugar per fluid ounce, 35 percent of calories from fat, and 10 percent of calories from saturated fat. These requirements apply to nondairy beverages sold as part of and separately from reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. Products that meet the federal and state requirements for nondairy milk substitutes are included on the CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages webpage. **Resources** Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE) Beverage Requirements (CSDE webpage) Guide to Meal Modifications in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE) Identifying Products that Meet the USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE) List 17: Dairy Alternative Beverages (CSDE's List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages) Milk Substitutes (CSDE's Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage)	Same

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Requirement	Grades K-12	Preschool (ages 1-5)
Documentation for requesting fluid milk substitutes for non-disability reasons	**SBP, ASP, and SMP:** Milk substitutes for non-disability reasons require a written statement that identifies the need for the milk substitute. This statement may be submitted by the parent/guardian, a state licensed healthcare professional, or a registered dietitian. This statement must be maintained on file with the student's medical records. **NSLP:** Documentation is not required. Effective January 14, 2026, the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 rescinds the requirement at lunch for a written statement that identifies the need for the milk substitute for non-disability reasons.	Milk substitutes for non-disability reasons require a written statement that identifies the need for the milk substitute. This statement may be submitted by the parent/guardian, a state licensed healthcare professional, or a registered dietitian. This statement must be maintained on file with the student's medical records.

Resources

Afterschool Snack Program (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/afterschool-snack-program

Allowable Beverages for Connecticut Public Schools (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/compfoods/allowable_beverages_public_schools.pdf

Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/milk_substitutes_snp.pdf

Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-documentation-for-the-child-nutrition-programs

Crediting Summary Charts for the Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/crediting/crediting_summary_charts_snp.pdf

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Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs (USDA):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/tn/fbg

Identifying Products that Meet the USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/identify_allowable_nondairy_milk_substitutes_snp.pdf

List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/list-of-acceptable-foods-and-beverages

Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/meal_pattern/resources_school_meal_patterns_snp.pdf

Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-school-nutrition-programs

Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs

Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12 (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/menu-planning-guidance-for-school-meals

Menu Planning Guidance Series for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs#MenuPlanningGuidanceSeries

Milk Component (CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/crediting-foods-in-school-nutrition-programs/milk

Milk Substitutes (CSDE's Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-school-nutrition-programs/milk-substitutes

Module 3: Meal Pattern Comparison of Preschool and Grades K-12 (CSDE's Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/preschool-meal-pattern-training#module3

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National School Lunch Program Regulations (7 CFR 210):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-210

Offering Lactose-Free and Lactose-Reduced Milk in the School Nutrition Programs (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/specdiet/lactose_free_reduced_milk_snp.pdf

Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs Module 4: Milk Component (CSDE):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-patterns-preschoolers-in-school-nutrition-programs/preschool-meal-pattern-training

School Breakfast Program Regulations (7 CFR 220):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-220

Special Diets in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-diets-in-school-nutrition-programs

Special Milk Program (CSDE webpage):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-milk-program

Special Milk Program Regulations (7 CFR 215):
https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/subtitle-B/chapter-II/subchapter-A/part-215

USDA Final Rule: Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans (89 FR 31962):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/fr-042524

USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs (91 FR 25073):
https://www.fna.usda.gov/cn/fr-050826

USDA Memo SP 01-2025: Fluid Milk Requirements for School Meals:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fluid-milk-requirements-schools

USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program:
https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/wmfhka-implementation

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What's in a Meal Module 9: Milk Component (CSDE's Training Program, What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12):
https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/meal-pattern-training-materials#module9

Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025:
https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/222/text

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For more information, visit the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage or contact the school nutrition programs staff 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/nslp/crediting/resources_school_meal_patterns_snp.pdf.

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   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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