



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Sponsors of School Nutrition Programs

FROM: Shannon K. Yearwood, Bureau Chief *Shannon Yearwood*
Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs

DATE: February 2, 2026

SUBJECT: Operational Memorandum No. 05-26
CT Fresh Ed: Compass

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), in partnership with the University of Connecticut, is pleased to announce the official launch of the CT Fresh Ed: Compass, a statewide Farm to School readiness and growth tool for local educational agencies (LEAs). The CT Fresh Ed: Compass is designed to capture key elements of Farm to School operations across Connecticut and to support continuous improvement of Farm to School practices within LEAs and schools participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs (CNP).

CT Fresh Ed: Compass - What

The development of the CT Fresh Ed: Compass was guided by an advisory committee composed of national, state, and local partners to ensure the tool is meaningful, evaluative, and actionable for stakeholders across Connecticut. The CT Fresh Ed: Compass is a structured instrument that captures key components of Farm to School implementation within each LEA across the three foundational pillars, Cafeteria, Classroom, and Community, with an additional focus on Coordination. The Compass Snapshot (summary) reflects current practices related to LEA and school-level initiatives, food service operations, and Farm to School related programming.

The CT Fresh Ed: Compass will be completed by all National School Lunch Program (NSLP) sponsors during school year (SY) 2025-26 and administered periodically thereafter. Additionally, all LEAs participating in an interschool agreement will be required to complete the CT Fresh Ed: Compass. Data collected through the CT Fresh Ed: Compass will establish a statewide baseline of Farm to School activities for NSLP-participating LEAs and provide a consistent, statewide view of implementation efforts.

CT Fresh Ed: Compass data will inform regional action planning and continuous improvement efforts led by the Regional Farm to School Coordinators and will support the identification of strengths, gaps, and areas where targeted technical assistance may be beneficial. The CSDE plans to administer the CT Fresh Ed: Compass every three years to evaluate progress, evaluate ongoing needs, and refine strategies to support sustained impact.

CT Fresh Ed: Compass - Why

The CT Fresh Ed: Compass:

- Establishes a common framework for evaluating and strengthening Farm to School practices across Connecticut.
- Produces a standardized Snapshot of the data analysis from the CT Fresh Ed: Compass to support data-informed planning at the school, district, state, regional, and local levels.
- Enables collaboration with LEAs to develop or refine action plans to enhance Farm to School operations and is tailored to local needs.
- Contributes to aligning with broader LEA goals related to nutrition, education, community engagement, and local food systems.

CT Fresh Ed: Compass - How

Each LEA participating in the USDA NSLP will complete the online CT Fresh Ed: Compass to generate the Snapshot of current Farm to School practices across the LEA's cafeterias, classrooms, and communities. Each LEA will be assigned a unique code for accessing the CT Fresh Ed: Compass for their LEA.

LEAs are encouraged to gather relevant information in advance, including Farm to School activities, procurement practices, educational initiatives, policies, and partnerships; completion may involve collaboration among food service staff, educators, administrators, and community or farm partners, as appropriate.

The CSDE and Regional Farm to School Coordinators will use CT Fresh Ed: Compass Snapshot data to inform technical assistance, professional development, and strategic planning. LEA's may also use the Snapshot to support local planning, training, continuous improvement, and expansion of the LEA's Farm to School operations.

Statewide Training Requirement

All NSLP sponsors are required to participate in the CT Fresh Ed: Compass mandatory statewide training for LEAs.

- Date: Thursday, February 5, 2026
- Time: 2:00–3:00 p.m.
- Format: School Lunch Tray Table Talk
- Attendance: Mandatory

The training will provide an overview of the CT Fresh Ed: Compass, outline expectations for completion, and demonstrate how to use the online tool. Additional details with the registration link will be shared in advance.

Questions

For questions related to the CT Fresh Ed: Compass, SFAs may contact their [CSDE school nutrition team member](#).

The CSDE appreciates the continued partnership of LEAs and school nutrition sponsors in advancing Farm to School practices and strengthening access to fresh, local, and regionally sourced foods for Connecticut students.

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Important: This is a numbered Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) operational memorandum that contains important program information. Please read carefully and retain for future reference. All CSDE operational memoranda are posted on the CSDE's [Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.