

# The School Lunch Tray: June 14, 2023

Dear School Sponsors of Child Nutrition Programs:

The School Lunch Tray contains the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) weekly email notifications for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) school nutrition programs. This week's topics are listed below.

## **Action Items**

- None

## **Need to Know**

- Now Available: Updated Free and Reduced-price Eligibility Forms for School Year (SY) 2023-24
- Operational Memorandum No. 13-23: Paid Lunch Equity: Guidance for SY 2023-24
- Data on Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Participation for SY 2022-23
- Updated NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 for SY 2023-24
- Updated Menu Planning Checklists for Lunch for Grades K-12 for SY 2023-24
- Updated Preschool Meal Patterns for SY 2023-24: NSLP, SBP, and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP)
- Updated Preschool Menu Planning Forms for SY 2023-24
- Updated Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) Meal Pattern for Grades K-12 for SY 2023-24
- Updated ASP Sample Menus for Grades K-12 and Preschoolers
- Sesame: The Ninth Major Food Allergen
- Resource Roundup: CSDE's Training Program: What's in a Meal Module 11: Grains Component

## **Good to Know**

- None

Please review and share with appropriate staff members. For previous versions of the School Lunch Tray, visit the CSDE's [School Lunch Tray and Table Talk](#) webpage.



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## Need to Know

### Now Available: Updated Free and Reduced-price Eligibility Forms for School Year (SY) 2023-24

The updated SY 2023-24 free and reduced-price eligibility forms are available on the CSDE's [Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Milk in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. **Note:** Some forms are still being updated. If a form is not available, it is being revised and will be issued soon. **The updated forms are dated June 2023 except Addendum C, which follows a different year and will be updated in October 2023.**

As a reminder, school food authorities (SFAs) that use web-based applications and permit parents/guardians to submit their applications online must ensure that their forms contain the required language. For more information, refer to the CSDE's [Considerations for Using Web-based Applications](#). The CSDE strongly encourages sponsors to use the templates provided on the CSDE's [Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Milk in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Additionally, the USDA's [Eligibility Manual for Schools Meals](#) (dated July 18, 2017) is the federal guidance to use when processing applications and conducting verification.

Please note the following:

- Important documents addressing the processing of free and reduced-price applications are available on the CSDE's [Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Milk in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.
- For the updated income guidelines for school nutrition programs, refer to the CSDE's [Income Guidelines for Determining Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals or Free Milk in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- Application certification training modules are available on the CSDE's [Training for Child Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

For questions, contact your [school nutrition team member](#).

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### Operational Memorandum No. 13-23: Paid Lunch Equity: Guidance for SY 2023-24

The CSDE recently issued [Operational Memorandum No. 13-23](#), Paid Lunch Equity: Guidance for SY 2023-24, including the Paid Lunch Equity Tool (PLE). Note that exemptions are allowed. If a sponsor qualifies and wants to request an exemption, *one of the two authorized signers* will need to complete a brief online survey by **June 30, 2023**. *Please carefully read this memorandum.* Qualifying sponsors that do not complete the online survey requesting an exemption by June 30, will be required to establish prices for paid lunches according to the PLE provisions. This includes completing the SY 2023-24 PLE tool. Questions may be directed to your [school nutrition team member](#).

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### Data on Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Participation for SY 2022-23

Healthy Food Certification (HFC) is in its sixteenth year of implementation with SY 2022-23 and has the highest participation since HFC began in SY 2006-07. The data below summarizes HFC participation for SY 2022-23.

- 185 school districts/schools (96.9% of eligible districts/schools)
- 4 new districts/schools
- 100% recertification rate
- 1.1% increase in HFC participation from SY 2021-22
- 90.8% increase from the first year (2006-07) to the current school year

The CSDE's handout, [Healthy Food Certification Participation for School Year 2022-23](#), includes a list of participating districts and schools, comparison charts of HFC participation from last year to this year, and a year-to-date summary. You can find additional information on the CSDE's [Healthy Food Certification](#) webpage, including a [color-coded map](#) of the towns implementing HFC, and a [HFC Data presentation](#) about current HFC participation data.

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### Updated NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 for SY 2023-24

The SY 2023-24 NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 are now available.

- The lunch meal patterns reflect the new sodium target (target 1A) effective July 1, 2023, as required by the USDA's final rule, [Transitional Standards for Milk, Whole Grains and Sodium](#). For more information on the sodium limits, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Transitional Sodium Limits for the NSLP and SBP](#). The breakfast meal patterns have not changed.
- All lunch and breakfast meal patterns include updated menu planning notes to include additional guidance and resources, including the CSDE's training program, [What's in a Meal: National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#).

All NSLP and SBP meal patterns are available in the "[Documents/Forms](#)" section of the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. These meal patterns are dated June 2023.

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### Updated Menu Planning Checklists for Lunch for Grades K-12 for SY 2023-24

The CSDE's [Menu Planning Checklists for Lunch for Grades K-12](#) for SY 2023-24 (dated June 2023) are now available. These checklists assist SFAs with planning meals to meet the NSLP meal pattern. Checklists are available for five-day and seven-day weeks for the required grade groups (K-5, 6-8, and 9-12) and the optional grade groups for K-8.

## The School Lunch Tray: June 14, 2023

### Updated Preschool Meal Patterns for SY 2023-24: NSLP, SBP, and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP)

The updated SY 2023-24 preschool meal patterns for the NSLP, SBP, and ASP (dated June 2023) are now available on the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. The meal pattern requirements have not changed but the menu planning notes are updated to include additional guidance and resources.

- [ASP Meal Pattern for Preschoolers](#)
  - [Breakfast Pattern for Preschoolers](#)
  - [Lunch Meal Pattern for Preschoolers](#)
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### Updated Preschool Menu Planning Forms for SY 2023-24

Updated preschool menu planning forms for the NSLP, SBP, and ASP are available in the [Menu Forms for Preschoolers](#) section of the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. These forms are dated June 2023.

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### Updated Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) Meal Pattern for Grades K-12 for SY 2023-24

The updated [ASP meal pattern for grades K-12](#) for SY 2023-24 (dated June 2023) is now available in the "[Meal Patterns for the ASP](#)" section of the CSDE's ASP webpage. The meal pattern requirements have not changed but the menu planning notes are updated to include additional guidance and resources.

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### Updated ASP Sample Menus for Grades K-12 and Preschoolers

Updated sample ASP menus for grades K-12 and preschoolers (dated June 2023) are available in the "[Menu Planning for the ASP](#)" section of the CSDE's ASP webpage.

- [Sample ASP Menu for Ages 3-4](#)
  - [Sample ASP Menu for Grades K-12](#)
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### **Sesame: The Ninth Major Food Allergen**

The Food Allergy Safety, Treatment, Education, and Research (FASTER) Act, a federal law passed in 2021, named sesame as the ninth major food allergen, requiring it to be declared on food labels effective January 1, 2023. Sesame joins the eight other major food allergens including milk, eggs, fish, Crustacean shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, and soybeans. However, you may not see sesame listed as an allergen on food packages or a declaration included in the [USDA Foods Database](#) right away.

The law establishing sesame labeling does not require food products that were in distribution or inventory before January 1, 2023, to be removed from the marketplace or relabeled to declare sesame as an allergen. Depending on shelf-life, some food products may not have allergen labeling for sesame on the effective date. USDA Foods vendors are working to update their allergen information in the USDA Foods Database; however, currently there are some USDA Foods products without this declaration.

During this transition period, it is important to proceed with caution, check the label every time a product is received, and contact vendors directly with questions about whether a product contains sesame. For more information on sesame allergen labeling and what to expect, visit the [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\) website](#).

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### **Resource Roundup: CSDE's Training Program: What's in a Meal Module 11: Grains Component**

This 57-minute module is the eleventh in the CSDE's *What's in a Meal* training program and reviews the requirements and crediting information for the grains component. Topics include the required daily and weekly servings, allowable grains and grain products, creditable grain ingredients, how to identify whole and enriched grains, the crediting requirements for different types of grains (breakfast cereals, commercial grain products, commercial combination foods, and grain foods made from scratch), and restrictions for crediting grain-based desserts. This module also describes resources for guidance and training on the grains component. Access this module and the other What's in a Meal modules on the CSDE's [Meal Pattern Training for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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For more information, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [School Lunch Tray and Table Talk](#) 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/SLT/2023/SLT\\_06\\_14\\_2023.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/SLT/2023/SLT_06_14_2023.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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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