

The School Lunch Tray: June 12, 2024

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

- Request Alternate Lunch Time Outside the Timeframes of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Due July 1, 2024
- Food Safety Inspection Report for SY 2023-24 must be completed in the Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Online Application and Claiming System by October 31, 2024

Need to Know

- No Table Talk on Thursday, June 13, 2024
- Operational Memorandum No. 12-24: Paid Lunch Equity: Guidance for School Year 2024-25
- Important Information for Districts Contracting with a Food Service Management Company (FSMC)
- Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) Virtual Training: Introduction to School Nutrition Leadership: August 6-8, 2024
- USDA Webinar on Final Rule - Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*
- Resource Roundup: Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the School Nutrition Programs

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.



Action Items

Request Alternate Lunch Time Outside the Timeframes of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Due July 1, 2024

School food authorities (SFAs) are reminded that schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must offer lunch not earlier than 10:00 a.m. and not later than 2:00 p.m., including on planned half-days and early dismissal days, unless the NSLP sponsor has requested and been authorized by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to serve lunch outside of these regulatory timeframes. To request an alternate lunch time outside the timeframe of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. for either a regular school day or planned half day, NSLP sponsors must submit a waiver request to the CSDE. The CSDE must evaluate the circumstances of each request to determine whether it meets one of the two USDA criteria for an exemption from the specified timeframe for lunch:

1. The CSDE may grant reasonable variances from the meal service time requirements to accommodate special circumstances encountered in schools operating for traditional students at traditional times. For example, if a school has a condensed schedule on a planned half day, the school may need to serve lunch prior to 10 a.m. due to capacity and may therefore request an exception from the CSDE to serve outside of the 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. timeframe.
2. The CSDE may grant reasonable variances from the meal service time requirements if the school operates for traditional students but at a nontraditional time. For example, a school may need to provide lunch service from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. to accommodate a work study program that allows high school students to work in the morning and attend high school classes in the later afternoon or evening. For this specific circumstance, the CSDE will grant a meal service time variance only if: a) these alternative programs provide high school grade students an opportunity to obtain the minimum requirements for graduation at a nontraditional time; and b) it is not possible to serve lunch during the 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. timeframe.

The written request for a variance in lunch service times must be submitted to the CSDE by one of the designated authorized signers for the local educational agency and must include a description of the special circumstances at the school that make it necessary for the school to serve lunch outside of the required NSLP service times. The CSDE may grant variances from lunch meal service times only if one of the two criteria specified above are met. Variances from the required lunch service timeframe will not be approved for routine scheduling choices, such as block schedules.

Requests for variances in NSLP meal service times must be submitted via email to the SFA's CSDE [school nutrition team member](#) by **July 1 of each school year**. For more information, refer to [OM No. 02-23 National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\) Requirements for Regular and Shortened School Days](#).

Food Safety Inspection Report for SY 2023-24 must be completed in the Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Online Application and Claiming System by October 31, 2024

As required in section 9(h) of the NSLA, 42 U.S.C. 1758(h), at least twice a year, schools must obtain a food safety inspection conducted by a state or local agency responsible for such inspections. As part of that requirement, the CSDE must annually collect the total number of inspections conducted at each SFA and report the number to the Food and Nutrition Services by November 15, 2024. The food safety inspections requirement applies to all food preparation-service sites and service-only sites.

The Food Safety Inspection Report for SY 2023-24 must be completed in the [CNP System](#) at the **same time** the sponsor completes and submits the annual sponsor application, but no later than October 31, 2024. Guidance begins on page 29 of the [Updating the Sponsor Application for School Nutrition Programs](#) guide. The Food Safety Inspection Report can be completed by anyone who has access to the CNP System.

Food safety inspections for facilities not under the jurisdiction of the local or state health department: Some schools or facilities (such as schools or group homes operated by the Department of Children and Families) do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Public Health (DPH) and therefore, will not be inspected by DPH or the local health department. **However, food safety inspections conducted by the state agency that licenses the facility qualify toward meeting the requirement of two food safety inspections annually.**

While the CSDE recognizes that there may be difficulty in obtaining the two food safety inspections, SFAs are responsible for requesting such inspections and documenting such efforts. When two health inspections are not conducted, each sponsor is responsible for requesting the inspections and documenting these efforts (refer to the CSDE's [Sample Letter for Food Safety Health Inspection for the National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\) and School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)](#)).

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Need to Know

No Table Talk on Thursday, June 13, 2024

Table Talk will not be held on Thursday, June 13, 2024, but will resume on Thursday, June 27, 2024. In the meantime, questions for future Table Talk sessions may be submitted in advance at <https://forms.office.com/g/GWS7DCbbg0>.

Operational Memorandum No. 12-24: Paid Lunch Equity: Guidance for School Year 2024-25

[Operational Memorandum No. 12-24](#) provides important information regarding the [Paid Lunch Equity \(PLE\) tool for school year 2024-25](#). This memorandum is available in the [School Nutrition Memos 2024](#) section of the CSDE's [Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

For additional PLE guidance, visit the "[Paid Lunch Equity](#)" section of the CSDE's Financial Management for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Important Information for Districts Contracting with a Food Service Management Company (FSMC)

During this renewal period, some FSMCs have required SFAs to open negotiations to the guarantee to entertain negotiations to the annual fees increase. These two items are not mutually exclusive. The annual fees increase, noted by the maximum allowable Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 4.6% for 2024-25, may be negotiated at a lower rate without any guarantee discussion. Opening negotiations to the guarantee opens the SFA to a potential rebid.

The contract guarantee can never change from a surplus to breakeven or vice versa; and can never change from a breakeven to a deficit, or a surplus to a deficit, or any combination. Any of these changes require the SFA to rebid the contract as soon as possible. Additionally, any change greater than the simplified acquisition threshold, at the federal level or a more stringent local threshold, would also necessitate a rebid. For questions or concerns, please contact Andy Paul at andrew.paul@ct.gov and Sean Fogarty at sean.fogarty@ct.gov.

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Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) Virtual Training: Introduction to School Nutrition Leadership: August 6-8, 2024

On August 6-8, 2024, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., the CSDE will be hosting the Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN) *Introduction to School Nutrition Leadership*, a three-day virtual training program planned specifically for new and aspiring directors of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. This training will provide an overview of the many responsibilities of the school nutrition director. The goal is to build the new director's knowledge base, provide multiple tools and resources, allow opportunities to network, and improve confidence in operating the school nutrition programs.

- **Required attendance:** All school nutrition directors hired within the past year are **required to attend all three days.**
- **Cost:** None.
- **Registration:** Refer to the attached flier. Space is limited to 40 participants, so register today to reserve a seat. Priority will be given to new school nutrition directors. The registration deadline is **June 28, 2024.**
- **More information:** Refer to the attached flier and course schedule. For questions regarding course content or registration, contact the ICN Training Coordinator, Sarah Thomas at sbthoma1@olemiss.edu. For other questions, contact Teri Dandeneau at teri.dandeneau@ct.gov.

USDA Webinar on Final Rule - Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

On May 9, 2024, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) hosted a [webinar](#) to provide an overview of the final rule, *Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. A recorded version of that webinar and the slides are now available at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/school-nutrition-standards-updates/webinar>. Additional guidance on the final rule is available on the USDA's [Updates to the School Nutrition Standards](#) webpage.

Resource Roundup: Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the School Nutrition Programs

As a reminder, grain-based desserts must meet specific requirements to credit in the school meal patterns for grades K-12. The CSDE's resource, [Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#), provides guidance on the crediting criteria for grain-based desserts, how to identify grain-based desserts, the limit for grain-based desserts at lunch, crediting restrictions for grain-based desserts at breakfast and snack, and serving grain-based desserts as extra foods. This resource is available in the "[Grains Component for Grades K-12](#)" section of the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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/2024//SLT_06_12_2024.pdf.

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
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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