

# The School Lunch Tray: July 31, 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

- None

## Need to Know

- Updated CSDE Resource: Menu Planning Guide for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs: School Year 2024-25
- Preschoolers Eating with Other Grades (Co-Mingled Meals)
- Family Style Meal Service for Preschoolers
- Resource Roundup: Cycle Menus for Preschoolers

## Good to Know

- Team Nutrition's Back-to-School webpage

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.



## Need to Know

### Updated CSDE Resource: Menu Planning Guide for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs: School Year 2024-25

The school year 2024-25 version of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs](#) (dated July 2024) is available. Previous versions are obsolete. The revised version reflects the changes implemented effective July 1, 2024, by the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), and includes updated content, resources, and links. This guide assist school food authorities (SFAs) with planning menus to meet the requirements of the USDA's preschool meal patterns for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP. The preschool meal patterns apply to ages 1-5.

### Preschoolers Eating with Other Grades (Co-Mingled Meals)

“Co-mingling” is the practice of serving reimbursable meals or ASP snacks to a variety of grades in the same service area at the same time, such as preschoolers and grades K-5 or preschoolers and grades K-8. When students are co-mingled, SFAs may use the meal pattern of the older grades for preschoolers if 1) the preschoolers and students from older grade groups (such as K-5, K-8, or K-12) are served meals or ASP snacks together in the same place at the same time; 2) it is hard to tell the preschoolers from older students; and 3) it would be operationally difficult to serve different foods or different amounts of foods during the combined meal or ASP snack service.

When SFAs use the meal pattern of the older grades for preschoolers during co-mingled meal service, all daily and weekly requirements of the meal pattern for the older grades also apply to preschool meals. In addition, if the school implements offer versus serve (OVS) for the older grades at breakfast and lunch, the same OVS requirements also apply to co-mingled reimbursable meals for preschoolers. This is the only situation when OVS is allowed for preschoolers. Without co-mingling, OVS is not allowed for preschool meals.

Detailed guidance on the requirements for co-mingled meals and ASP snacks is available in section 4 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs](#). Training on co-mingled meals is available in “Module 2: Introduction to Preschool Meal Patterns” of the CSDE's [Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs](#).

SFAs **must** follow the preschool meal patterns when meals are served to preschoolers in a different area (such as a separate serving line or classroom meals) or at a different time than older grades.

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### Family Style Meal Service for Preschoolers

The USDA recommends family-style meal service for ages 3-5. Family-style meal service allows children to serve themselves from communal platters or bowls of food with assistance, if needed, from supervising adults who role model healthy eating practices. This approach allows children to identify and be introduced to new foods, new tastes, and new menus; while developing a positive attitude toward healthy foods, sharing in group eating situations, and developing good eating habits.

The CSDE has observed many compliance issues with family-style meal service in schools. SFAs must carefully consider whether the preschool program has the capacity to implement family-style meal service correctly and ensure that reimbursable meals are served. Schools that choose to implement family-style meal service must develop written procedures that inform staff and indicate how the school will comply with all requirements. For detailed guidance on the requirements for family-style meal service and the SFA's written procedures, refer to section 4 of the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guide for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs](#).

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### Resource Roundup: Cycle Menus for Preschoolers

The Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN) [Cycle Menus for Child Care: Preschoolers](#) features four seasonal four-week cycle menus for preschoolers. ICN also offers an online learning course, [CARE Connection – Planning Cycle Menus in Child Care](#). For more information, visit the "[Cycle Menus](#)" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns for CACFP Child Care Programs webpage.

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## Good to Know

### Team Nutrition's Back-to-School webpage

Team Nutrition's [Back-to-School](#) webpage has ready-to-go menu planning, nutrition education, and school meal promotion resources that support the updates to the school nutrition standards published in the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#).

- [Back-to-School Social Media Shareables](#): Use the graphic and messages to spread the word about Team Nutrition's back-to-school resources and show commitment for serving up nutritious and delicious school meals in school year 2024-25.
- [School Breakfast Posters](#): Display these colorful posters around the school to encourage school breakfast participation and promote the benefits of a nutritious breakfast. This set of two posters is now available in print.

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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/2024/slt\\_07\\_31\\_2024.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/slt/2024/slt_07_31_2024.pdf).

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