


## The School Lunch Tray: August 20, 2025

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**

- Triennial Assessment (Due June 30, 2025) and Reporting Form Due September 15, 2025
- Food Safety Inspection Report for School Year 2024-25 Due October 31, 2025
-  CT Grown for CT Kids Week, October 6-10, 2025, Celebrating "Fresh Starts with CT Grown"

### **Need to Know**

- Update on Additional State Funding for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) for School Year 2025-26
- Two New Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program Parent Notification Letters
- Virtual Office Hours Addressing the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program, August 28, 2025
- CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 11-25: Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Payment for School Year 2024-25
- New School Year 2025-26 What's in a Meal Training Modules for Staff Training
- Offer versus Serve (OVS) Requirements for School Year 2025-26
- Resource Roundup: Key Information for Connecticut Claims Preparers for School Nutrition Programs

### **Good to Know**

- None



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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

#### Triennial Assessment (Due June 30, 2025) and Reporting Form Due September 15, 2025

As a reminder, all sponsors were federally required to complete the triennial assessment of their Local School Wellness Policy (LSWP) by June 30, 2025, and to make the results publicly available. This includes posting the assessment summary on the organization's website or sharing it through other public channels.

In addition, the CSDE requires all sponsors to complete the [Triennial Assessment Reporting Form](#) by September 15, 2025. This reporting form allows the CSDE to track sponsor compliance with federal requirements related to the triennial assessment and public disclosure of LSWP implementation.

For guidance and resources related to the triennial assessment and local wellness policies, visit the "[Triennial Assessments](#)" section of the CSDE's School Wellness Policies webpage. For questions, email [fionnuala.brown@ct.gov](mailto:fionnuala.brown@ct.gov).

The CSDE thanks sponsors for their continued efforts to support student health and wellness in Connecticut schools.

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#### Food Safety Inspection Report for School Year 2024-25 Due October 31, 2025

The Food Safety Inspection Report for school year (SY) 2024-25 must be completed in the [Connecticut Online Application and Claiming System for Child Nutrition Programs](#) (CNP System) by October 31, 2025

As required in section 9(h) of the NSLA, 42 U.S.C. 1758(h), at least twice each 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, 2025. The food safety inspections requirement applies to all food preparation-service sites and service-only sites.

The Food Safety Inspection Report for SY 2024-25 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, 2025. Guidance begins on page 31 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.

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**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 \(SBP\)](#)).



### CT Grown for CT Kids Week, October 6-10, 2025

*Celebrating “Fresh Starts with CT Grown”*

CT Grown for CT Kids Week, established by legislation ([Section 22-38d of the Connecticut General Statutes](#)), is celebrated annually during the first full week of October. This year’s theme—**“Fresh Starts with CT Grown”**—invites schools across the state to celebrate local food and its role in healthy beginnings. Mark your calendars and join in the celebration!

This week is a time to recognize the essential role school nutrition professionals play in connecting students with fresh, locally grown food. Whether planning menus, managing kitchens, or leading school wellness efforts, school nutrition professionals make a lasting impact on students’ health and their connection to Connecticut agriculture.

Program sponsors are key to bringing this initiative to life by featuring CT Grown foods on menus, hosting taste tests, spotlighting local farms, or incorporating educational elements in cafeterias. Participation can be as simple or creative as desired.

The 2025 theme encourages schools and districts to kick off the school year with healthy habits, strong local partnerships, and a renewed commitment to fresh, nutritious food. Let’s work together to give students a fresh start with CT Grown! Stay tuned for toolkits, menu templates, promotional materials, and a countdown to help schools get ready for CT Grown for CT Kids Week.

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### Need to Know

#### **Update on Additional State Funding for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) for School Year 2025-26**

**Effective July 1, 2025, the State of Connecticut will no longer provide additional funding** to cover the household share of breakfast and lunch meals for students who are not eligible for free meals through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. Beginning with the 2025–26 school year, families who do not qualify for free meals will be responsible for paying the district's established prices for student breakfast and lunch.

Local educational agencies (LEA) should communicate this change to households through the dissemination of the [Free and Reduced-Price Meal Application materials](#) and the application process.

The CSDE understands this will be a change for some families and encourage all LEAs to remind households to review the income eligibility guidelines and submit a [Free and Reduced-Price Meal Application](#) if they believe they may qualify.

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#### **Two New Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program Parent Notification Letters**

Determining officials now have the option of using two new S-EBT parent/guardian notification letters when notifying households of a child's free or reduced-price eligibility based on S-EBT.

- [S-EBT Parent/Guardian Notification Letter for Free Eligibility](#)
- [S-EBT Parent/Guardian Notification Letter for Reduced-price Eligibility](#)

Districts may find these two new letters easier to use than the [Parent/Guardian Notification Letter for Free/Reduced-price Eligibility](#), especially districts that use software for free and reduced-price applications.

The Spanish versions will be coming soon. All parent/guardian notification letters are available in the "[Eligibility: Approval/Denial of Free and Reduced Meals](#)" section of the CSDE's Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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### Virtual Office Hours Addressing the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program, August 28, 2025

The CSDE will conduct a virtual Teams office hour on August 28, 2025, from 2:00 to 3:00 pm. This session will address S-EBT updates and answer questions districts may have regarding S-EBT and student eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals. Please [submit S-EBT questions](#) prior to the office hours to help the CSDE make this the most useful time possible:

Use the Teams link below to access the office hour.

**Microsoft Teams** [Need help?](#)

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 214 131 956 773 9

Passcode: MG9er7Bd

**Dial in by phone**

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[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 320 257 801#

For organizers: [Meeting options](#) | [Reset dial-in PIN](#)

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### CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 11-25: Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Payment for School Year 2024-25

[CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 11-25](#): Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Payment for School Year 2024-25 includes the calculation methods for the school year (SY) 2024-25. HFC payments and list of school food authorities that qualify for the HFC payment for SY 2024-25.

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### New School Year 2025-26 What's in a Meal Training Modules for Staff Training

The CSDE's training program for school year 2025-26, [What's in a Meal: Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#), is now available for back-to-school staff training. What's in a Meal consists of 18 recorded modules that provide comprehensive guidance on complying with the meal patterns for grades K-12 in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP, and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP. These modules are intended for school food service professionals in the NSLP, SBP, ASP, and SSO, including food service directors, managers, and staff.

The 2025-26 modules (listed below) reflect the current meal pattern requirements and nutrition standards for the NSLP, SBP, and ASP, including the updates required by the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#).

- Module 1: Introduction to Training
- Module 2: Introduction to School Meal Patterns
- Module 3: National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Meal Pattern
- Module 4: School Breakfast Program (SBP) Meal Pattern
- Module 5: Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) Meal Pattern (new)
- Module 6: Dietary Specifications
- Module 7: Meal Pattern Documentation for School Menus
- Module 8: Meal Pattern Documentation for Crediting Commercial Processed Products
- Module 9: Milk Component
- Module 10: Meats/Meat Alternates Component
- Module 11: Fruits Component
- Module 12: Vegetables Component
- Module 13: Grains Component
- Module 14: Whole Grain-rich (WGR) Requirement
- Module 15: Grain Ounce Equivalents
- Module 16: Water Availability During Meal Service
- Module 17: Offer versus serve (OVS) in the NSLP
- Module 18: Offer versus serve (OVS) in the SBP

School nutrition personnel may use this training program to count toward the annual training hours required by the USDA's Professional Standards for School Nutrition Program Professionals.

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### Offer versus Serve (OVS) Requirements for School Year 2025-26

Guidance on the OVS requirements for school year 2025-26 is available in the CSDE's resources below.

- [Overview of Offer versus Serve \(OVS in the National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)\)](#)
- [Overview of Offer versus Serve \(OVS in the School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)\)](#)

Training on the OVS requirements is available in What's in a Meal modules 17 and 18 (refer to "[New School Year 2025-26 What's in a Meal Training Modules Now Available for Staff Training](#)" above). For more information and resources, visit the CSDE's [OVS](#) webpage.

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### Resource Roundup: Key Information for Connecticut Claims Preparers for School Nutrition Programs

The CSDE's [Key Information for Connecticut Claims Preparers for School Nutrition Programs](#) provides an overview of important information and resources for Connecticut claims preparers regarding about entering accurate claims for reimbursement of meals and milk in the USDA school nutrition programs operated by the district's school food authority (SFA). Claims preparers who are new to the position or need a refresher should review this important information.

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For more information, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's [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/2025/slt\\_08\\_20\\_2025.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/slt/2025/slt_08_20_2025.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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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