

## The School Lunch Tray: August 27, 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
- Reminder: Annual Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs Due September 15, 2025
- CSDE Virtual Office Hour: How to Complete and Submit the Annual Financial Report on September 9, 2025
- Important Reminder: Disaster Preparedness for School Food Authorities (SFAs)

### **Need to Know**

- Reminder: Virtual Office Hour Tomorrow (August 28, 2025) Addressing the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program
- Two New Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program Parent Notification Letters
- Checking the Direct Certification Website
- Reminder: New Product-based Limits for Added Sugars for School Year (SY) 2025-26, Effective July 1, 2025
- Reminder: New Requirements for ASP Meal Pattern for Grades K-12 as of July 1, 2025
- Operational Memorandum No. 12-25: Federal Meal Reimbursement Rates for School Year (SY): July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026
- Reminder Calendar of School Nutrition Program Requirements and Activities for School Year 2025-26
- Back to School Trainings with the CT Fresh Ed Team 
- Resource Roundup: Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the School Nutrition Programs

### **Good to Know**

- None

## The School Lunch Tray: August 27, 2025



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.

## The School Lunch Tray: August 27, 2025

### Reminder: Annual Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs Due September 15, 2025

To maintain the school food authority's (SFA) nonprofit status, the NSLP regulations require that the fund balance (net cash resources [NCR]) of the nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA) cannot exceed three months' average expenditures at any time. SFAs must document compliance with the NCR requirement by submitting the annual Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs in the [Connecticut Online Application and Claiming System for Child Nutrition Programs \(CNP System\)](#) by **September 15, 2025**. The CSDE's [Instructions for Submitting the Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs](#) provides step-by-step guidance on how to complete this report.

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### CSDE Virtual Office Hour: How to Complete and Submit the Annual Financial Report on September 9, 2025

The CSDE will conduct a virtual Teams office hour for school food authorities (SFAs) on September 9, 2025, from 10:00-11:00 am. This session will answer questions on completing and submitting the Annual Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs, which is due September 15, 2025.

Use the Teams link below to access the office hour.

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

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 266 176 566 326 1

Passcode: DD65Uk9A

#### Dial in by phone

[+1 860-840-2075,,914341578#](#) United States, Hartford

[Find a local number](#)

Phone conference ID: 914 341 578#

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

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### Important Reminder: Disaster Preparedness for School Food Authorities (SFAs)

The [USDA Foods Program Disaster Manual](#) and the Connecticut State Department of Education Food Distribution Program (CSDE FDP) document, [Disaster Feeding Guidance for School Food Authorities Using USDA Foods](#), address a SFA's response to disasters. Please review and share with appropriate staff. If there is a Presidential declaration, HPC Foodservice will have priority to assist the State of Connecticut.

The [USDA's The Food Safety Emergency Response Pocket Guide](#) (also available in Spanish) supports school food service professionals in their response to food safety emergencies caused by disasters and weather-related events. An additional resource includes the Fact Sheet, [USDA Foods During Disaster](#).

SFAs may be called upon by town officials or the Red Cross to serve food to the public through congregate feeding. SFAs that use USDA Foods must keep records of the USDA Foods used and any transportation costs. If there is a Presidential declaration, the CSDE FDP will work with SFAs on the USDA application process for replacement and reimbursement. The USDA provides replacement in situations of distress only to the extent that Food and Nutrition Service funds are available. Please keep the CSDE FDP informed if your district opens shelters that involve congregate feeding by emailing Monica Pacheco at [monica.pacheco@ct.gov](mailto:monica.pacheco@ct.gov) or Allison Calhoun-White at [allison.calhoun-white@ct.gov](mailto:allison.calhoun-white@ct.gov).

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## The School Lunch Tray: August 27, 2025

### Need to Know

#### **Reminder: Virtual Office Hour Tomorrow (August 28, 2025) Addressing the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (S-EBT) Program**

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**

[+1 860-840-2075,,320257801#](#) United States, Hartford

[Find a local number](#)

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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

These letters are available in English and Spanish under "Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (S-EBT)" 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.

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.

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## The School Lunch Tray: August 27, 2025

### Checking the Direct Certification Website

As a reminder, districts and direct certification contacts should check the direct certification website on *Wednesdays*. The direct certification match is conducted on Mondays and Tuesdays. Therefore, the match is not completed until Wednesday. If the website is checked on Monday or Tuesday, some students that were directly certified may be missed. Additionally, please check the “View All Certified Records” option weekly to ensure that all directly certified students are accounted for when conducting the match to the district’s student database.

[View All Certified Records](#)

View	Report Date	# of SASID's
<a href="#">View</a>	08/27/2025	15
<a href="#">View</a>	08/26/2025	324
<a href="#">View</a>	08/19/2025	11

### Reminder: New Product-based Limits for Added Sugars for School Year (SY) 2025-26, Effective July 1, 2025

As a reminder, the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), product-based limits for added sugars in breakfast cereals, yogurt, and flavored milk. These requirements apply to the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns, effective July 1, 2025.

- **Breakfast cereals** cannot exceed 6 grams of added sugars per dry ounce ([7 CFR 210.10\(c\)\(2\)\(iii\)\(B\)](#)). This requirement applies to the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool. For additional guidance, refer to the Institute of Child Nutrition’s fact sheet, [Nutrition Standards for Added Sugars: Breakfast Cereals](#), and the CSDE’s resource, [Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- **Yogurt and soy yogurt** cannot exceed 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces (no more than 2 grams per ounce) ([7 CFR 210.10\(c\)\(2\)\(iv\)\(C\)](#)). This requirement applies to the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool. For additional guidance, refer to the Institute of Child Nutrition’s fact sheet, [Nutrition Standards for Added Sugars: Yogurt](#), and the CSDE’s resource, [Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- **Flavored milk** served in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks cannot exceed 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces. Flavored milk sold as a competitive food in middle and high schools cannot exceed 15 grams of added sugars per 12 fluid ounces. ([7 CFR 210.10\(d\)\(1\)\(iii\)](#)). This requirement applies to the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns for grades K-12. Flavored milk is not allowed in the preschool meal patterns. For additional

## The School Lunch Tray: August 27, 2025

guidance, refer to the Institute of Child Nutrition's fact sheet, [Nutrition Standards for Added Sugars: Flavored Milk](#).

Sponsors must ensure that all NSP, SBP, and ASP menus comply with the new requirements.

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### Reminder: New Requirements for ASP Meal Pattern for Grades K-12 as of July 1, 2025

The CSDE is in the process of reviewing Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) menus and has noticed many meal pattern compliance issues. As a reminder, there is a new [ASP meal pattern for grades K-12](#) as of July 1, 2025, due to the USDA's final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). This new meal pattern has significant changes from the previous version, including the requirements below.

- Grain-based desserts are not allowed, such as cookies, granola bars, breakfast bars, doughnuts, fruit turnovers, and cake. The only except is sweet crackers (e.g., animal and graham crackers), which should be limited to no more than twice per week. For a list of Grain-based desserts, refer to the CSDE's [Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- New limits for added sugars apply to yogurt (no more than 12 grams of added sugars per 6 ounces), breakfast cereals (no more than 6 grams per dry ounce), and flavored milk (no more than 10 grams of added sugars per 8 fluid ounces).
- Juices cannot exceed 50 percent of fruits and vegetables.
- At least 80 of the grains offered at snack must be whole-grain rich (WGR).
- Noncreditable grains in WGR and enriched grain foods cannot exceed 3.99 grams per portion for groups A-E or 6.99 grams per portion for groups H-I. The groups refer to the grain groups in the CSDE's [Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs](#).
- Raw leafy greens like lettuce, spinach, and kale credit as half the volume served, e.g., 1 cup of raw leafy greens credits as ½ cup of the vegetables component.
- Dried fruits credit as twice the volume served, e.g., ¼ cup of dried fruit credits as ½ cup of the fruits component.

For more information, refer to the CSDE's [Afterschool Snack Program Handbook](#) and [Summary of Final Rule Updates to the Meal Patterns for the School Nutrition Programs](#).

**ASP sponsors must ensure that snack menus comply with the new requirements.** Noncompliant menus will delay the CSDE's ASP approval process. Training on the ASP meal pattern requirements is available under "[ASP Meal Pattern Training](#)" in the "Meal Patterns and Crediting" section of the CSDE's ASP webpage.

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## The School Lunch Tray: August 27, 2025

### **Operational Memorandum No. 12-25: Federal Meal Reimbursement Rates for School Year (SY): July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026**

[Operational Memorandum No. 12-25 Federal Meal Reimbursement Rates for School Year \(SY\): July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026](#) summarizes the annual adjustments to the federal reimbursement rates for local educational agencies for lunches, breakfasts, afterschool snacks, and milk served to students participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program, Afterschool Snack Program, and Special Milk Program; and the NSLP reimbursement rate for USDA donated foods for SY 2025-26. This memorandum is also available in the “[School Nutrition Memos 2025](#)” section of the CSDE’s Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs webpage. Please review and share with appropriate staff.

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### **Reminder Calendar of School Nutrition Program Requirements and Activities for School Year 2025-26**

The CSDE’s [Calendar of School Nutrition Program Requirements and Activities](#) helps school food authorities (SFAs) comply with the many requirements and due dates associated with operating the USDA’s school nutrition programs. Please share this calendar with all staff members responsible for reporting and compliance in your school nutrition programs. Note: Schedules on this calendar are subject to change and do not represent all federal and state requirements for operating the USDA Child Nutrition Programs in schools and institutions.

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### Back to School Trainings with the CT Fresh Ed Team

The Regional Farm to School Coordinators and UConn Extension team are busy working with districts across the state to provide two local foods trainings for school nutrition staff as they prepare for the school year. *Easy Local Food Preparation* and *Showcasing Local on the Line* workshops have already taken place with Plymouth, Waterford, EdAdvance, Woodbridge, East Hampton, Region 17, Plainville, Wolcott and Thomaston schools with many more happening in the coming days. Staff have shown excitement in enhancing their knowledge and skills in working with local food in the kitchen and creating encouraging cafeteria environments for their students.

The CT Fresh Ed team is working on a plan to offer more trainings and more information is coming soon. In the meantime, sponsors can contact their assigned [Regional Farm to School Coordinator](#) to support their farm to school goals and needs.



### Resource Roundup: Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the School Nutrition Programs

Menu planners must ensure that school menus for grades K-12 and preschool meet the meal pattern and crediting requirements for the school nutrition programs. Detailed crediting guidance and resources for each meal component (grains, meats/meat alternates, vegetables, fruits, and milk) are available on the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. For a list of resources and websites to assist SFAs with meeting the USDA's meal pattern and crediting requirements, refer to the CSDE's [Meal Pattern and Crediting Resources for the School Nutrition Programs](#).

## The School Lunch Tray: August 27, 2025

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\\_27\\_2025.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/slt/2025/slt_08_27_2025.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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