

The School Lunch Tray: September 10, 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

- Final Reminder: Triennial Assessment (Due June 30, 2025) and Reporting Form Due September 15, 2025
- Final Reminder: Annual Financial Report for School Nutrition Programs Due September 15, 2025

Need to Know

- New Training for School Year 2025-26: Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT
- New Training for School Year 2025-26: Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs
- New CSDE Resource: Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs
- Reminder: Request Alternate Lunch Time Outside the Timeframes of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- Correction: Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) Daily Snack Count and Production Record for Grades K-12 in Site/Area Eligible Schools
- Resource Roundup: Key Information for Connecticut School Business Officials about School Nutrition Programs

Good to Know

- New Food Yields in the Food Buying Guide
- Upcoming Training Webinars from the Institute of Child Nutrition
- New Team Nutrition Trainings for Successful School Menu Planning
- New Resource from the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC): Summer EBT: Strategies for Communications and Outreach



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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

Final Reminder: 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.

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

Final 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.

Need to Know

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New Training for School Year 2025-26: Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT

The CSDE's new training program, [Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT](#), replaces the previous training program, Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs and Summer Food Service Program. This Determining Eligibility training program is a series of recorded modules that provide guidance on complying with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations for determining a child's eligibility for:

- free or reduced-price meals or free milk in the school nutrition programs [National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP, Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and Special Milk Program (SMP);
- free meals in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP);
- and eligibility for the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (S-EBT).

This training program is intended for the staff responsible for approving applications for free and reduced-price meals or free milk and conducting direct certification. It includes the modules below.

- Module 1: Introduction to Application Certification
- Module 2: Processing Applications Part 1 – Starting the Application Process
- Module 2: Processing Applications Part 2 – Receiving and Processing Applications
- Module 2: Processing Applications Part 3 – Reviewing Applications and Special Consideration
- Module 2: Processing Applications Part 4 – Notification, Documentation, and Final Steps
- Module 3: Direct Certification
- Module 4: Test Your Knowledge About Processing Applications
- Module 5: Confidentiality and Disclosure

Each module includes a handout of the content and a resource list.

New Training for School Year 2025-26: Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs

The CSDE's new [Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs training module](#) provides guidance on complying with the USDA regulations for verifying a child's eligibility for free or reduced-price meals in the NSLP and SBP. This training program is intended for the staff responsible for conducting the verification process, including annual verification and verification for cause.

As a reminder, sponsors of the NSLP and SBP that collect and review free and reduced-price meal applications must conduct verification by **November 15** of each year to confirm students' eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals. Additional guidance on verification is available on the CSDE's [Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

New CSDE Resource: Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs

The CSDE's [Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs](#) replaces the CSDE's previous resource, Crediting Guide for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12. This new guide provides comprehensive information and resources to assist school food authorities (SFAs) with crediting foods and beverages toward the USDA meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool in the NSLP, SBP, ASP, and SSO. This is the go-to resource for ensuring that meals and afterschool snacks meet the crediting requirements of the NSLP, SBP, and ASP meal patterns.

This guide is part of the CSDE's menu planning guidance series for the school nutrition programs. The menu planning guidance series for the meal patterns for grades K-12 is available on the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12](#) webpage. The preschool menu planning guidance series is available on the CSDE's [Meal Patterns for Preschoolers in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Reminder: Request Alternate Lunch Time Outside the Timeframes of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

The CSDE reminds school food authorities (SFAs) that schools participating in the 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 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

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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](#). For more information, refer to [Operational Memorandum No. 03-22](#). Updated Requirements for Lunch Periods in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

Correction: Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) Daily Snack Count and Production Record for Grades K-12 in Site/Area Eligible Schools

The [Afterschool Snack Program \(ASP\) Daily Snack Count and Production Record for Grades K-12 in Site/Area Eligible Schools](#) has been updated to correct the meal component servings listed at the top of the form. The correct servings are 1 cup milk, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup vegetables, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup fruits, 1 ounce equivalent grains, and 1 ounce equivalent meats/meat alternates. The updated version is dated September 2025.

Funding Available for Processing and Storing Local Food: Microgrants for CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Due September 17, 2025



With the announcement of this year's [CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program](#), Regional Farm to School Coordinators are facilitating microgrants (\$5,000 or less) as an opportunity to purchase equipment to increase capacity to process and store produce. This funding can support the purchase of key equipment items for using local foods in school meals including the items below.

- New knives
- Food processors
- Commercial slicers
- Immersion blenders
- Vacuum sealers
- Blast chillers
- Industrial chest freezers
- Blenders
- Sectionizers
- Cut gloves
- Peelers
- Cutting boards

The microgrant deadline is September 17, 2025, at noon. Reach out to your [Regional Farm to School Coordinator](#) for support regarding project ideas and how to apply. General coaching sessions are also available. For more information, visit the "[Apply](#)" section of the CT Grown for CT Kids Grant webpage.

Resource Roundup: Key Information for Connecticut School Business Officials about School Nutrition Programs

The CSDE's resource, [Key Information for Connecticut School Business Officials about School Nutrition Programs](#), provides an overview of important information and key resources for Connecticut school business officials regarding the oversight of the USDA's school nutrition programs operated by the district's school food authority (SFA). Please share this information with your school business officials.

Good to Know

New Food Yields in the Food Buying Guide

The USDA recently added new food yields to the [Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs \(FBG\) Interactive Web-based Tool](#) and the [FBG Mobile App](#). The following new foods are now available: Crushed pineapple, pineapple chunks, pineapple tidbits, dried mango, açai puree, dragon fruit (pitaya), and chopped romaine lettuce.

Upcoming Training Webinars from the Institute of Child Nutrition

The [Institute of Child Nutrition \(ICN\)](#) offers free trainings on a broad range of topics for child nutrition professionals working in school nutrition and child care settings.

- **September 25, 2025:** School Nutrition Strategies, Trainings, Action Plans, and Resources (STAR) Webinar – Farm to School: Tips for Increasing Locally Grown or Raised Food Options
- **October 2, 2025:** Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition (CICN) Webinar – Streamlining Food Production: How to Create Operational Efficiencies to Allow for More Scratch and Speed Scratch Food Production
- **October 30, 2025:** STAR Webinar – Best Practices for Crafting Cycle Menus

To receive webinar and registration information for upcoming webinars, [subscribe](#) to the ICN newsletter. A link to register will be sent to subscribers one week before the webinar date.

Past webinars are available on the ICN's [iLearn](#) online learning management system.

New Team Nutrition Trainings for Successful School Menu Planning

Team Nutrition added seven short trainings to [The Road to Successful Menu Planning for School Meals](#) training series. These on-demand webinars help schools plan and implement menus that meet school nutrition standards and meal pattern requirements:

Menu Planning

- [Menu Planning for the National School Lunch Program Afterschool Snack Service](#)
- [Nuts and Seeds Flexibilities in School Meals](#)
- [School Breakfast Menu Flexibilities: Grains and Meats/Meat Alternates and Substituting Vegetables for Fruit](#)
- [School Lunch Menu Flexibilities: Beans, Peas, and Lentils](#)

Reducing Added Sugars

- [Reducing Added Sugars at Breakfast: Menu Planning Tips](#)

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- [Reducing Added Sugars in Recipes](#)
- [Using Nutrient Analysis Software for Added Sugars](#)

Each training counts toward USDA Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs – Key Area 1000: Nutrition and Training Topic 1100: Menu Planning. They are available now in the [Institute of Child Nutrition's iLearn portal](#) and [USDA's Professional Standards Trainings and Tracker Tool](#).

New Resource from the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC): Summer EBT: Strategies for Communications and Outreach

FRAC's [Summer EBT: Strategies for Communications and Outreach](#) is a new case study featuring insights from the Arizona Food Bank Network, Greater Chicago Food Depository, and Hunger Solutions New York. This document outlines state requirements for Summer EBT outreach and communication and highlights best practices.

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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_09_10_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

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