

The School Lunch Tray: January 28, 2026

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. 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: Onsite Monitoring for School Year 2025-26 Must be Completed by February 1, 2026
- Final Reminder: Redistribution Application for Federal Local Food for Schools Incentive Program (LFSIP) Funds: Due February 2, 2026 📅
- Reminder: Mandatory CT Fresh Ed: Compass Training on Thursday, February 5, 2026 📅
- Reminder CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program application is open 📅

Need to Know

- USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program
- Updated School Year 2025-26 NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12
- Revised USDA Product Formulation Statement (PFS) Templates and Samples
- Updated CSDE Resources for Meal Pattern Crediting Documentation
- Updated CSDE Menu Planning Guidance Series for School Year 2025-26
- Updated CSDE Crediting Resources for School Year 2025-26

Good to Know

- Chill Out with Cold Milk Cooler Giveaway Deadline: February 28, 2026

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Action Items

Final Reminder: Onsite Monitoring for School Year 2025-26 Must be Completed by February 1, 2026

The onsite monitoring requirements for school year 2025-26 the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP), and Food Service Management Company (FSMC) operations must be completed by **February 1, 2026**. All monitoring forms are available under "[Monitoring Forms](#)" on the CSDE's Forms for School Nutrition Programs webpage, and the applicable sections of each webpage indicated below. For detailed guidance, refer to [The School Lunch Tray from January 14, 2026](#).

Final Reminder: Redistribution Application for Federal Local Food for Schools Incentive Program (LFSIP) Funds: Due February 2, 2026



On January 15, 2026, all unspent Federal LFSIP funds were swept by the CSDE and are now available for redistribution to school food authorities (SFAs) that participated in the Federal LFSIP **and fully commit to spending 100 percent of their allocated funds by April 30, 2026**. (For a list of SFAs eligible for the redistribution of funds, refer to Attachment 1 in [CSDE Operational Memorandum 02-25: Local Food for Schools Incentive Program: Phase 2](#)). After funds are redistributed, any money not spent by April 30, 2026, and not submitted for payment by May 15, 2026, will be forfeited and may be reallocated at the CSDE's discretion. SFAs whose applications are accepted will receive a minimum \$1,600 allocation.

Any SFA that spent less than 50 percent of its Federal LFSIP allocation by January 15, 2025, as identified in the CSDE's [School Food Authorities Expending Less Than 50 Percent of Federal Local Food for Schools Incentive Program \(LFSIP\) Allocation](#), must submit a detailed spending plan to be considered for redistributed funds. This spending plan must explain how the SFA will use 100 percent of the redistributed funds and must identify the specific products to be purchased and the farms from which those products will be sourced.

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Reminder: Mandatory CT Fresh Ed: Compass Training on Thursday, February 5, 2026



The CSDE will conduct a Mandatory CT Fresh Ed: Compass Training on Thursday, February 5, 2026. CT Fresh Ed: Compass is a statewide Farm to School readiness and growth tool for local educational agencies (LEAs). The CT Fresh Ed: Compass is designed to capture key elements of Farm to School operations across Connecticut and to support continuous improvement of Farm to School practices within LEAs and schools participating in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs (CNP). This training will provide an overview of the CT Fresh Ed: Compass, outline expectations for completion, and demonstrate how to use the online tool.

- **Date:** Thursday, February 5, 2026
- **Time:** 2:00–3:00 p.m.
- **Format:** Virtual through Table Talk
- **Attendance:** Mandatory

Microsoft Teams meeting

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Reminder CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program application is open

The **CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program** provides funding to eligible USDA Child Nutrition Program sponsors to support the purchase of locally and regionally sourced unprocessed and minimally processed foods, strengthening local agriculture while supporting nutritious meals statewide.

- **Application:** [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program SY 2025-2026 Application](#)

For more information, refer to [Operational Memorandum No. 2-26: CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program](#) and the resources below.

- [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program Questions and Answers](#)
- [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program School Year 2025-26 Allocations for Eligible School Food Authorities](#)

These resources are available in the [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program](#) section of the CSDE's CT Fresh Ed website.

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Need to Know

USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program

On January 14, 2026, the USDA released [USDA Memo SP 01-2026: Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 – Implementation Requirements for the National School Lunch Program](#). This memorandum provides guidance on the updated requirements for milk and fluid milk substitutes in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) under the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025. Below is summary of the key changes for the NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12. Please refer to USDA Memo SP 01-2026 for details.

- **Allowable types of milk for the NSLP:** Effective January 14, 2026, whole and reduced-fat (2%) milk are allowed in the NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12, in addition to low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk. SFAs may choose which types of milk to offer but must serve a variety of milk (at least two different choices including at least one unflavored choice). For more information, refer to [“Allowable Types of Milk”](#) in the “Milk” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- **Optional fluid milk substitutes (nondairy beverages) for non-disability reasons in the NSLP:** SFAs continue to have the option to offer allowable nondairy milk substitutes to all students for non-disability reasons in the NSLP. However, NSLP sponsors are no longer required to notify the state agency if they are serving nondairy beverages to grades K-12 in the NSLP. In addition, students who request a nondairy milk substitute for non-disability reasons at lunch are no longer required to submit a written request from their parent/guardian, a state licensed healthcare professional, or a registered dietitian that identifies the reason for the milk substitute. For more information, refer to the CSDE’s resources, [Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs](#) and [Identifying Products that Meet the USDA’s Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the School Nutrition Programs](#), and visit [“Milk Substitutes for Non-disability Reasons”](#) in the “Milk” section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.
- **Requesting fluid milk substitutes (nondairy beverages) for disability reasons in the NSLP:** Previously, fluid milk substitutes for disability reasons required a written statement from a state licensed healthcare professional or registered dietitian (RD). A written statement is still required to request a nondairy milk substitute for disability reasons. However, for lunch only, this statement may now be submitted by a parent/guardian, licensed healthcare professional, or RD.

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- **Dietary specifications for saturated fat for breakfast and lunch menus:** For the NSLP only, the dietary specifications exclude fluid milk from the weekly limit for saturated fat. All other dietary specifications (calories, sodium, and effective July 1, 2027, added sugars) still apply to the entire reimbursable meal, and the contribution from fluid milk must be included in those calculations.

Note: The Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025 requirements above are specific to the NSLP meal patterns for grades K-12. Additional guidance from the USDA may impact this law applies to school nutrition programs other than the NSLP, including the SBP, SSO, ASP, SMP, and CACFP At-Risk Afterschool Meals Program. The CSDE will update SFAs as the USDA issues future guidance.

For more information and crediting resources for the milk component visit the [“Milk”](#) section of the CSDE’s Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Updated School Year 2025-26 NSLP and SBP Meal Patterns for Grades K-12

Updated versions of the school year 2025-26 NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 (dated January 2026) are available. The changes include updates to the “Menu Planning Notes” section (including information on optional fluid milk substitutes), corrected links, and formatting changes. In addition, the changes below apply to specific meal patterns.

- **NSLP meal patterns only:** Note 2 in the “Menu Planning Notes” section of the NSLP meal patterns reflects the addition of whole milk and reduced-fat (2%) milk as allowable milk options at lunch, effective January 14, 2026, as implemented by the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025.
- **Corrected SBP meal patterns:** The previous links to the [Five-day Breakfast Meal Pattern for Grades K-8 Option](#) and the [Seven-day Breakfast Meal Pattern for Grades 9-12](#) were incorrect. Corrected and updated versions are posted now.

The NSLP and SBP meal patterns are available for five-day weeks and seven-day weeks in the [“Breakfast Meal Patterns”](#) section and [“Lunch Meal Patterns”](#) section of the CSDE’s [Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Please discard all previously downloaded versions of the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12 and replace them with the versions dated January 2026.

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Revised USDA Product Formulation Statement (PFS) Templates and Samples

The USDA recently revised their product formulation statement (PFS) templates and samples for food industry partners to demonstrate how a food product may contribute to the meal pattern requirements in the Child Nutrition Programs (CNP). Manufacturers may voluntarily provide a PFS at the request of program operators, but the USDA does not approve these forms.

The revised USDA PFS templates and samples add clarity and provide additional instructions for manufacturers, and update terminology to align with current CNP guidance. A new sample PFS for documenting how to credit a food product containing meats/meat alternates (MMA) is included with the revised PFS templates and existing samples for grains and vegetables. New samples for combination foods that contribute to more than one meal component are also available.

The PFS forms and samples are available on the USDA's [Manufacturer Documentation: Child Nutrition Labels and Product Formulation Statements](#) webpage. SFAs can also access these forms from the "[Product Formulation Statements](#)" section of the CSDE's Crediting Documentation for the Child Nutrition Programs webpage.

As a reminder, the USDA requires a PFS for all commercial processed products without a CN label that are not listed in the USDA's [Food Buying Guide for Child Nutrition Programs](#) (FBG). SFAs must obtain and verify the PFS for accuracy prior to purchasing, serving, and claiming the food product in reimbursable meals and afterschool snacks. For detailed guidance on each required element and how to review a PFS, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs](#), and visit the USDA's updated [Child Nutrition Programs: Tips for Evaluating a Manufacturer's Product Formulation Statement](#) webpage. Guidance on how to review a grain PFS is available in the CSDE's resource, [When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs](#).

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Updated CSDE Resources for Meal Pattern Crediting Documentation

The CSDE revised the crediting documentation resources below to include the updated USDA PFS templates and resources. The updated versions are dated January 2026.

- **CSDE Guide:** [Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Accepting Processed Product Documentation in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Using Child Nutrition \(CN\) Labels in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Using Product Formulation Statements in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs](#)

Updated CSDE Menu Planning Guidance Series for School Year 2025-26

The CSDE revised the guides below to include the updated USDA PFS templates and resources and the new requirements of the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025.

- [Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Guide to Menu Documentation for the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Guide to the Dietary Specifications for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#)
- [Guide to the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#)

The updated versions are dated January 2026 and are available on the CSDE's [Menu Planning Guidance for School Meals for Grades K-12](#) webpage.

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Updated CSDE Crediting Resources for School Year 2025-26

The CSDE has revised the school year 2025-26 crediting resources to include the updated USDA PFS templates and resources and the new requirements of the Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act of 2025. These documents provide guidance on crediting specific foods in the meal patterns for grades K-12 and the preschool meal patterns (ages 1-5). The current versions are dated January 2026 and are available on the CSDE's [Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Milk Component

- [Comparison of Meal Pattern Requirements for the Milk Component in School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Using Bulk Milk Dispensers in the School Nutrition Programs](#)

Meats/Meat Alternates Component

- [Crediting Beans, Peas, and Lentils in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Commercial Meat/Meat Alternate Products in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Deli Meats in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Nuts and Seeds in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Yogurt in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Requirements for Alternate Protein Products in the School Nutrition Programs](#)

Vegetables Component and Fruits Component

- [Crediting Juices in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Smoothies in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Soups in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Vegetable Subgroups in the National School Lunch Program](#)

Grains Component

- [Comparison of Meal Pattern Requirements for the Grains Component in School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Enriched Grains in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Breakfast Cereals in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Crediting Grain-based Desserts in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#)
- [Crediting Whole Grains in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Calculation Methods for Grain Ounce Equivalents for the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Grain Ounce Equivalents for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#)
- [Guide to Meeting the Whole Grain-rich Requirement for the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [How to Identify Creditable Grains for the Preschool Meal Patterns of the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- [How to Use the Grain Ounce Equivalents Chart for the School Nutrition Programs](#)

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- [When Commercial Grain Products Require a Product Formulation Statement to Credit in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
 - Weekly Whole Grain-rich Percentage
 - [Instructions for the Worksheet to Calculate the Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the School Nutrition Programs for Grades K-12](#)
 - [Calculating the Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
 - [Worksheet to Calculate the Weekly Percentage of Whole Grain-rich Menu Items in the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12](#)
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Good to Know

Chill Out with Cold Milk Cooler Giveaway Deadline: February 28, 2026

SFAs can ensure that their students have the best tasting milk possible by submitting a [Chill Out with Cold Milk a milk temperature survey](#) for a chance to win a free milk cooler. Surveys can be submitted [online](#) or emailed to info@newenglanddairy.com by 11:59 p.m. on **February 28, 2026**. Full details and official contest rules are available at NewEnglandDairy.com. Funding for this program is provided by the Connecticut Milk Promotion Board and New England Dairy.

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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_01_28_2026.pdf.



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