

The School Lunch Tray: February 4, 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

- CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 03-26: Requirements for Submitting the Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Statement for School Year 2026-27
- CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 04-26: Interschool Agreements for School Year 2026-27: Due July 1, 2026 (Full Service) or August 30, 2026 (Vended)
- Final Reminder: Mandatory CT Fresh Ed: Compass Training on Thursday, February 5, 2026 

Need to Know

- CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 05-26: CT Fresh Ed: Compass 
- Updated Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) Meal Pattern for Grades K-12
- Updated Preschool Meal Patterns
- USDA Foods Entitlement and Meal Counts Update for School Year (SY) 2026-27

Good to Know

- National School Breakfast Week March 2-6, 2026: The Quest for School Breakfast

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Action Items

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 03-26: Requirements for Submitting the Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Statement for School Year 2026-27

Section 10-215f of the Connecticut General Statutes requires that every year, each local board of education or governing authority (BOE) for all public schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must certify whether all food items sold to students will or will not meet the Connecticut Nutrition Standards. This includes all public schools, regional educational service centers, the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS), charter schools, interdistrict magnet schools, and endowed academies.

[Operational Memorandum No. 03-26: Requirements for Submitting the HFC Statement for School Year 2026-27](#) provides the required motion language and summarizes the **steps that districts must take now** to ensure the accurate and timely submission of the 2026-27 HFC Statement by the deadline of **July 1, 2026**.

All BOEs **must** vote on whether to participate in the healthy food option of HFC.

- If the BOE votes “yes” to the healthy food option, a vote on whether to allow food exemptions is **required**. The BOE may choose to vote on whether to allow beverage exemptions.
- if the BOE votes “no” to the healthy food option, a vote on whether to allow food exemptions is **not** required. The BOE may choose to vote on whether to allow beverage exemptions.

The “[Annual HFC Application](#)” section of the CSDE’s HFC webpage provides information on the required steps for submitting the annual HFC Statement. The CSDE’s 21-minute video, [Completing the Application Process for HFC](#), provides detailed guidance on the HFC application process.

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CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 04-26: Interschool Agreements for School Year 2026-27: Due July 1, 2026 (Full Service) or August 30, 2026 (Vended)

[Operational Memorandum No. 04-26 Interschool Agreements for School Year 2026-27](#) provides guidance on the requirements and deadlines for submitting interschool agreements to the CSDE. Sponsors that vend or satellite meals to another district are required to submit and receive approval of an annual interschool agreement to the CSDE. This form must be signed by the authorized representative for the providing sponsor and the recipient site

- Full-service Interschool Agreements for schools that choose the healthy food option of Healthy Food Certification (HFC) must be submitted to the CSDE by **July 1, 2026**.
- Recipient Site Vended Interschool Agreements must be submitted to the CSDE at least two weeks before the start of the school year and no later than **August 31, 2026**.

The interschool agreement forms are available under “I” on the CSDE’s [Forms for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. Operational Memorandum No. 04-26 is available on the CSDE’s [School Nutrition Operational Memos 2026](#) webpage.

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Final 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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Need to Know

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 05-26: CT Fresh Ed: Compass



[CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 05-26: CT Fresh Ed: Compass](#) provides information on the new CT Fresh Ed: Compass, 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. The CT Fresh Ed: Compass will be completed by all NSLP sponsors during school year 2025-26 and administered periodically thereafter.

Updated Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) Meal Pattern for Grades K-12

The [Afterschool Snack Program \(ASP\) Meal Pattern for Grades K-12](#) is updated to include a missing menu planning note for crediting juices.

Updated Preschool Meal Patterns

Updated versions (February 2026) of the NSLP, SBP and ASP preschool meal patterns are include additional guidance in the menu planning note for crediting milk, including the link to the CSDE's resource, [Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs](#). The preschool meal patterns are available in the "[Meal Patterns](#)" section of the CSDE's Meal Patterns Preschoolers School Nutrition Programs webpage.

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Updated Resources for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs

Updated versions (dated February 2026) of the CSDE's resources for meal modifications below are available. These updates reflect 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, new content and resources, and updated links. The guidance in these documents applies to meal modifications for grades K-12 and preschool (ages 1-5) in all public schools, private schools, and residential child care institutions (RCCIs) that participate in the USDA school nutrition programs.

- **CSDE guide:** [Guide to Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- **Overview**
 - [Overview of the Requirements for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
 - [Summary Chart of the Requirements for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- **Fluid Milk Substitutes (Nondairy Beverages)**
 - [Allowable Fluid Milk Substitutes for Non-Disability Reasons in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
 - [Identifying Products that Meet the USDA's Nutrition Standards for Fluid Milk Substitutes in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- **Procedural Safeguards:** [Requirements for Procedural Safeguards for Meal Modifications in School Nutrition Programs](#)
- **Standard Operating Procedure (SOP):** [Sample Standard Operating Procedure \(SOP\) for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs](#)
- **Self-assessment:** [Self-assessment of Local Practices for Meal Modifications in the School Nutrition Programs](#)

Please discard any versions downloaded prior to today and replace them with the current versions dated February 2026.

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New CSDE Resource: Offering Lactose-Free and Lactose-Reduced Milk in the School Nutrition Programs

The CSDE's new resource, [Offering Lactose-Free and Lactose-Reduced Milk in the School Nutrition Programs](#), summarizes the crediting requirements for lactose-free and lactose-reduced milk in the school nutrition programs. These requirements apply to the meal patterns for grades K-12 and preschool (ages 1-5) in all public schools, private schools, and RCCIs that participate in the school nutrition programs.

USDA Foods Entitlement and Meal Counts Update for School Year (SY) 2026-27

In preparation for the SY 2026-27 USDA Foods catalog opening, the USDA's Web-Based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM) system has been updated. The SY 27 entitlement page now reflects the current per-meal rate of \$0.46 and each district's lunch meal counts from the most recently closed school year (SY 2024-25).

The USDA calculates estimated entitlement by multiplying the per-meal rate by reported lunch meal counts. These counts include SY 2024-25 lunch meals, as well as Seamless Summer Option (SSO) lunch meals, if applicable.

Please log into WBSCM to review the district's meal counts for accuracy and contact the [Food Distribution Staff](#) with any questions or needed corrections. The catalog is tentatively scheduled to open on February 20, 2026, and will close on March 11, 2026.

Districts that will be ordering USDA Foods for the first time and need to set up an account in WBSCM should contact the [Food Distribution Staff](#). For other questions regarding WBSCM, please contact the WBSCM Help Desk at WBSCM.servicedesk@CACI.com, or call 877-WBSCM-4U or 877-927-2648.

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Good to Know

National School Breakfast Week March 2-6, 2026: The Quest for School Breakfast

National School Breakfast Week (NSBW) celebrates the importance of a nutritious school breakfast in fueling students for success. This special observance during the first week of March celebrates the School Breakfast Program and the many ways it gives children a great start every day. For more information and resources, visit the School Nutrition Association's [National School Breakfast Week](#) webpage and [Your #NSBW26 Guide](#).

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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_02_04_2026.pdf.



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