

# The School Lunch Tray: May 13, 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

- Operational Memorandum No 09-26: Annual Application Process for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP): Deadline May 15, 2026

## Need to Know

- USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs: Effective June 8, 2026
- USDA Foods Update on Broccoli for School Year 2026-27
- Theme for Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Week, October 5-9, 2026: Breakfast and Beyond – CT Fresh All Day Long! 📺

## Good to Know

- Resource from The Foundation for Fresh Produce: The Fruit & Veggie Handbook
- Food Research & Action Center Webinar: Summer Meals: Outreach That Works, May 21, 2026
- GENYOUth Report: School Meals Are a Core Driver of Student Success

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## Action Items

### **Operational Memorandum No 09-26: Annual Application Process for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP): Deadline May 15, 2026**

[Operational Memorandum No 09-26, Annual Application Process for the Community Eligibility Provision \(CEP\)](#), provides guidance for school food authorities (SFAs) on the CEP application deadlines for school year (SY) 2026-27. Local educational agencies (LEA) are eligible to participate in the CEP if the Identified Student Percentage (ISP) for the entire district, groups of schools, or an individual school meets or exceeds 25 percent. Per federal regulations, SFAs are required to determine their ISP with data for each school that operates the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) from April 1, 2026.

LEAs and schools **must notify the CSDE no later than May 15, 2026**, if they intend to:

- formally apply for the CEP for the next school year;
- continue with their current ISP (for mid-cycle CEP participating LEAs and schools);
- recalculate their ISP;
- withdraw from the CEP and revert to the regular meal counting and claiming process; or,
- continue participating in CEP for one grace year (a fifth year) because the calculated ISP from April 1, 2026, is at least 15 percent, but less than 25 percent.

To notify the CSDE about the LEA/school's CEP decisions above, complete the [School Year 2026-27 Community Eligibility Provision Application Survey](#).

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## Need to Know

### **USDA Final Rule: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs: Effective June 8, 2026**

On May 8, 2026, the USDA published the final rule, [Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs](#). Effective June 8, 2026, this final rule with comment period expands fluid milk options by allowing schools and child and adult care providers participating in the Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs) to offer whole and reduced-fat milk to participants ages 2 and older. The final rule applies to the:

- National School Lunch Program (NSLP), including the Afterschool Snack Program (ASP), the NSLP and ASP preschool meal patterns, and Smart Snacks;
- School Breakfast Program (SBP), including the SBP preschool meal pattern;
- Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); and
- Special Milk Program (SMP).

This final rule codifies milkfat requirements following enactment of the [Whole Milk for Healthy Kids Act](#) and supports the statutory requirements for meals to align with the goals of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. It removes the previous fluid milkfat-content restrictions. It also extends the NSLP saturated fat exclusion for fluid milk in the weekly dietary specifications for grades K-12 to the SBP.

The final rule does not require CNP operators to offer whole or reduced fat milk. CNP operators may choose which varieties of fluid milk to offer within the requirements of each CNP meal pattern.

The USDA Food and Nutrition Service will be issuing an implementation memorandum to provide information and guidance on implementing the final rule. The CSDE will be updating all meal pattern and crediting resources to reflect this information and will notify sponsors when these updated versions are available.

### **Submitting Comments**

Comments on this final rule must be received by June 8, 2026. Comments may be submitted in writing by either method below.

- Online (preferred): Go to <http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the online instructions for submitting comments.
- Mail: Send comments to School Meals Policy Division, Food and Nutrition Service, 1320 Braddock Place, Alexandria, VA 22314.

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## USDA Foods Update on Broccoli for School Year 2026-27

The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) has informed the Connecticut Food Distribution Program (FDP) that a shortfall due to vendor constraints prevented the purchase of material code 110473, broccoli frozen 30 pounds, for October 15, 2026. There will not be another chance to reorder this material code, so please adjust menus as necessary. The AMS sincerely regrets any inconvenience and appreciates Recipient Agencies' understanding.

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## Theme for Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Week, October 5-9, 2026: Breakfast and Beyond – CT Fresh All Day Long!



The Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Week Planning Team is pleased to announce the theme for 2026 is **Breakfast and Beyond – CT Fresh All Day Long!** Including fresh, locally sourced CT grown products in school meals and snacks is not just for lunch. Start planning now to start the day off right with CT fresh items at breakfast and throughout the day. For more information, visit [CT Grown for CT Kids Week](#).

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## Good to Know

### Resource from The Foundation for Fresh Produce: The Fruit & Veggie Handbook

The Foundation for Fresh Produce's [Fruit & Veggie Handbook](#) provides information to help communicate the importance of eating more fruits and veggies for better health. This handbook addresses:

- what behavioral science says about how to create change;
- handy references for selecting, storing, and serving fruits and veggies;
- how to help people navigate the language of eating patterns and food systems;
- research on the role of fruits and veggies in disease prevention; and
- how to incorporate fruits and veggies in different areas of practice, including schools.

This handbook is also available in Spanish.

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### Food Research & Action Center Webinar: Summer Meals: Outreach That Works, May 21, 2026

Effective outreach is essential to ensuring that families know when, where, and how to access Summer Meals. This webinar will explore outreach strategies that help programs reach more children and boost participation throughout the summer.

- Date and time: Thursday, May 21, 2026, 3:00 p.m.
- Registration: [Summer Meals: Outreach That Works Webinar Registration](#)

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## GENYOUth Report: School Meals Are a Core Driver of Student Success

GENYOUth's new research report, "[Present, Engaged, and Thriving: The Power of a Wellness Culture in Schools](#)," explores chronic absenteeism and highlights key insights from a nationally representative survey of over 1,500 students ages 13-18. The report shows:

- School meals are a key driver of attendance, with positive meal experiences strongly correlated with students showing up to school.
  - A healthy breakfast is linked to improved focus, academic performance, and mental well-being.
  - Skipping breakfast is associated with higher absenteeism.
  - Students cite free meals as a reason to attend school.
  - Effective strategies include expanding grab-and-go breakfast, ensuring adequate lunch time, and providing meals for all students to reduce stigma and improve access.
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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/2026/slt\\_05\\_13\\_2026.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/slt/2026/slt_05_13_2026.pdf).



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