

The School Lunch Tray: June 10, 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

- Reminder: CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 08-26: Paid Lunch Equity Guidance for School Year 2026-27: PLE Request Due June 30, 2026
- Procedure to Request Alternate Lunch Time Outside the Timeframe of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- Reminder for Interschool Agreements in HFC Schools for School Year 2026-27: Due July 1, 2026
- CT Fresh Ed Buy Local Program Payment Request Form: Deadline June 15, 2026 📅
- CT Fresh Ed Compass Next Steps 📅

Need to Know

- USDA Memo SP 08-2026 and CACFP 04-2026: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs
- Name Change for USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA)

Good to Know

- New USDA Webpage: Child Nutrition Programs Food Industry Toolkit
- New England Dairy Smart Swaps Survey: Due June 30, 2026
- Build Dairy Farm to School Cafeteria-Classroom Connections
- Institute of Child Nutrition Webinar: Dig Safely into School Gardens 📅

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Action Items

Reminder: CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 08-26: Paid Lunch Equity Guidance for School Year 2026-27: PLE Request Due June 30, 2026

The CSDE's [Operational Memorandum 08-26: Paid Lunch Equity Guidance for School Year 2026-27](#) provides guidance regarding the paid lunch equity (PLE) allowances for school year 2026-27. Note that a PLE request is part of the memo and must be completed by June 30, 2026.

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

The CSDE reminds school food authorities (SFAs) that schools participating in the National School Lunch Program (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 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

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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 \(NSLP\)](#).

Reminder for Interschool Agreements in HFC Schools for School Year 2026-27: Due July 1, 2026

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**. [CSDE 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.

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.

CT Fresh Ed Buy Local Program Payment Request Form: Deadline June 15, 2026



This is a reminder that the next deadline for CT Fresh Ed Buy Local Program submissions is June 15, 2026. Sponsors may submit purchases through the [Buy Local Program Payment Request Form](#). **Note:** Sponsors do not need to submit multiple forms for multiple purchases as the purchase tracker on the form allows for reporting multiple purchases, vendor types, and dates.

Summer Maintenance: The Payment Request form will be closed for updating starting June 16, 2026, and will be reopened in early July.

Additional information about the CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program is available at [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program](#).

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CT Fresh Ed Compass Next Steps



Thank you to sponsors who have completed the CT Fresh Ed Compass. Upon completion, sponsors have access to the CT Fresh Ed Snapshot as well as technical assistance resources. [Regional Farm to School Coordinators](#) are available to meet with sponsors individually to review the snapshot and advise on the next steps. Reach out and schedule time with them this summer.

Need to Know

USDA Memo SP 08-2026 and CACFP 04-2026: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs

On June 4, 2026, the USDA issued [Memo SP 08-2026 and CACFP 04-2026: Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs](#). This memo provides information and guidance on implementation of the final rule with comment period, [Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs](#), published on May 8, 2026, and effective June 8, 2026. This final rule expands fluid milk options by allowing operators of the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Child and Adult Food Program, and the Special Milk Program to offer whole and reduced-fat milk to participants ages two and older, in addition to the previously allowed low-fat (1%) and fat-free milk.

For additional guidance on the milk component, visit the [Milk](#) section of the CSDE's Crediting Foods in School Nutrition Programs webpage.

Name Change for USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA)

As of June 1, 2026, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is now officially the Food and Nutrition Administration (FNA). The USDA is in the process of updating their website to reflect this change. The CSDE will also be updating applicable documents and resources to reflect this change.

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Good to Know

New USDA Webpage: Child Nutrition Programs Food Industry Toolkit

The USDA's new webpage, [Child Nutrition Programs Food Industry Toolkit](#), consolidates Team Nutrition resources dedicated to food industry partners. These resources support food products available to organizations operating the school nutrition programs, the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). Resources are grouped by topic, including child nutrition (CN) labels, product formulation statements, crediting, and more. Ideal for orienting new food industry staff and refreshing existing partners, this toolkit aims to provide all relevant resources in one place and reduce the time needed to access information that supports the USDA's child nutrition programs.

New England Dairy Smart Swaps Survey: Due June 30, 2026

New England Dairy is seeking feedback to better support schools using [Smart Swaps recipes](#). Please complete the [New England Dairy Smart Swaps Survey](#) by June 30, 2026. As a thank you, after August 20, 2026, New England Dairy will ship send an inflatable cow to schools that complete the survey.

For schools that are new to Smart Swaps, register for the School Nutrition Association's (SNA) webinar, [Smart Swaps in Action: Connecting Farms, Students, & School Meals](#) on June 17, 2026, from 3:00-4:15 p.m. During the webinar, New England Dairy and Jennifer Zarrilli, Food Service Director for Wolcott Public Schools in Connecticut and incoming SNACT President, will share tips and best practices.

Build Dairy Farm to School Cafeteria-Classroom Connections

Join classrooms across Connecticut in adopting a calf from Laurelbrook Farm with [Adopt a Cow](#). School nutrition professionals who register will receive a calf photo, adoption certificate, and year-round updates to share in the cafeteria, plus a bonus cafeteria kit with posters, stickers, cooler magnets, and more. After registering, school nutrition professionals may visit [Adopt a Cow Cafeteria Kits](#) to order additional cafeteria kits for other schools in the district. This program is funded by the Connecticut Milk Promotion Board and New England Dairy.

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Institute of Child Nutrition Webinar: Dig Safely into School Gardens

School gardens connect students to fresh food, support nutrition education, and help to build a culture of sustainability and health. However, a garden is a food production environment with food risks that must be reduced or eliminated for safe consumption. In this webinar, school nutrition professionals will learn about good agricultural practices and safe handling for every type of garden – in the ground, raised beds, straw bales, or hydroponic systems.

- Date and time: Wednesday, June 10, 2026, 3:00–4:00 p.m.
 - Registration: [Produce Webinar Series: Dig Safely Into School Gardens](#)
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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_06_10_2026.pdf.



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2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
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