

# The School Lunch Tray: June 17, 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 for CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 08-26: Paid Lunch Equity Guidance for School Year 2026-27: PLE Request Due June 30, 2026
- Reminder for Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Statement for School Year 2026-27: Due July 1, 2026
- Reminder for Interschool Agreements in HFC Schools for School Year 2026-27: Due July 1, 2026
- Reminder for Introduction to School Nutrition Leadership Virtual Training, August 4, 11, and 18, 2026: Registration Deadline is June 26, 2026
- CT Fresh Ed Back-to-School Professional Development Trainings for available for August and September 2026 

## Need to Know

- Operational Memorandum No. 11-26: Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Payment for School Year 2025-26
- New CSDE Resource: How to Check the Payment Status for Healthy Food Certification
- Vegetable Substitutions in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) for School Year 2026-27
- Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs for School Year 2026-27
- Offer versus Serve (OVS) Requirements for Grades K-12 for School Year 2026-27

## Good to Know

- None

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## Action Items

### Reminder for 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.

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### Reminder for Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Statement for School Year 2026-27: Due July 1, 2026

All public school sponsors of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) must submit the 2026-27 HFC Statement and upload their final board-approved minutes by July 1, 2026. [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 **July 1** deadline.

As a reminder, **only the district's authorized signer 1 or 2 is authorized to certify and submit the HFC Statement** in the Connecticut Online Application and Claiming System for Child Nutrition Programs (CNP System). Food service directors can see "Healthy Food Certification" in the CNP System's list of options but cannot access the current year's HFC Statement or enter any information. Once the district's authorized signer 1 or 2 completes the HFC statement, the food service director can view it.

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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## 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 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.

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## Reminder for Introduction to School Nutrition Leadership Virtual Training, August 4, 11, and 18, 2026: Registration Deadline is June 26, 2026

The CSDE is hosting a great training opportunity for sponsors of the school nutrition programs on August 4, 11, and 18, 2026, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The Institute of Child Nutrition’s (ICN) [Introduction to School Nutrition Leadership](#) Lite, is a 3-day **no cost** virtual training program planned specifically for new and aspiring directors of the NSLP and SBP. All school nutrition directors hired within the past year are **required** to attend this training program. **Food service directors who are retiring or leaving and are in the process of hiring a new director should consider reserving a slot to ensure that the new person can attend.**

School Nutrition Program Consultant, Lonnie Burt, will be back again this year to conduct the three-day webinar. This training will provide an overview of the many responsibilities of the school nutrition director. The goal is to build the new director’s knowledge base, provide multiple tools and resources, allow opportunities to network, and improve confidence in operating the school nutrition programs.

Space is limited to 40 participants, so register today to reserve a seat. Attendees must be able to download all training materials. No hard copies will be mailed.

The registration deadline is **June 26, 2026**. For more information refer to the attached flyer.

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## CT Fresh Ed Back-to-School Professional Development Trainings for available for August and September 2026



Regional Farm to School Coordinators, sponsored by the CSDE and UConn Extension, are offering free, in-person, 60-minute trainings tailored for school food service staff. These trainings offer participants the opportunity to learn new skills in farm to school through an interactive workshop. Consider incorporating these trainings into back-to-school professional development scheduling. These trainings count toward meeting professional standards. Five different training options are available.

- **Easy Local Food Preparation.** Food service staff will learn how to utilize and prepare local food easily and effectively, highlighting locally available farm produce.
- **Showcasing Local Food on the Line.** Food service staff will come away with engaging strategies to present and market local food to students in the cafeteria.
- **Knife Skills.** Food service staff will learn basic knife skills for local food prep.
- **Taste Tests.** Food service staff will learn the benefits and best practices for designing and executing taste tests.
- **Team Building to Elevate your Food Service Team.** Includes facilitated activities with food service staff that build pride in their work and team. By the end of the training, the group will identify a project that elevates school nutrition in the district.

School food authorities interested in these Back-to-School Trainings should complete the [UConn Extension Farm to School Professional Development Form](#) to indicate interest. Trainings are available on a first-come first-serve basis and will also be available during the rest of the school year based on interest and availability. Please contact [abigail.dubois@uconn.edu](mailto:abigail.dubois@uconn.edu) with questions.

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## Need to Know

### **Operational Memorandum No. 11-26: Healthy Food Certification (HFC) Payment for School Year 2025-26**

[Operational Memorandum No. 11-26: Healthy Food Certification \(HFC\) Payment for School Year 2025-26](#) includes the calculation methods for the school year 2025-26 HFC payments and a list of school food authorities that qualify for these payments.

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### **New CSDE Resource: How to Check the Payment Status for Healthy Food Certification**

The CSDE's new resource, [How to Check the Payment Status for Healthy Food Certification](#), shows the steps for checking the status of HFC funds on the CSDE's Bureau of Grants Management Grant Payment Report webpage. This resource and recent CSDE operational memoranda for the annual HFC payments are available in the "[HFC Payment](#)" section of the CSDE's HFC webpage.

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### **Vegetable Substitutions in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) for School Year 2026-27**

For school year 2026-27, the Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026 ([Public Law 119-37](#), the 2026 Appropriations Act), enacted on November 12, 2025, supersedes the requirements for vegetables at breakfast in the USDA final rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). The 2026 Appropriations Act allows school food authorities participating in the SBP to credit any vegetable offered in place of fruit without including vegetables from other subgroups in the weekly breakfast menus. For additional guidance, refer to [USDA Memo SP 05-2026, CACFP 03-2026, SFSP 03-2026: 2026 Appropriations Act: Effect on Child Nutrition Programs](#).

The [SBP meal patterns for school year 2026-27](#) (dated June 2026) and the resources below (dated June 2026) are updated to reflect this information.

- [Overview of Menu Planning for Grades K-12 in the SBP](#)
  - [Guide to the Meal Patterns for Grades K-12 in National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#)
  - [Crediting Guide for the School Nutrition Programs](#)
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# The School Lunch Tray: June 17, 2026

## Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs for School Year 2026-27

The CSDE's [Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs](#) for school year 2026-27 (dated May 2026) is now available. This training program reflects the current preschool meal pattern requirements and nutrition standards for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP, and Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, including the updates required by the USDA final rules, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent with the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and [Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs](#).

The Preschool Meal Pattern Training for the School Nutrition Programs consists of 10 recorded modules that provide comprehensive guidance on complying with the NSLP, SBP, and ASP preschool meal patterns.

- Module 1: Introduction to Training
- Module 2: Preschool Meal Patterns
- Module 3: Meal Pattern Comparison of Preschool and Grades K-12
- Module 4: Milk Component
- Module 5: Meats/Meat Alternates (MMA) Component
- Module 6: Vegetables Component
- Module 7: Fruits Component
- Module 8: Grains Component
- Module 9: Meal Service for Preschooler
- Module 10: Co-mingled Meal Service

This training program applies to all sponsors of the school nutrition programs that serve meals and snacks to preschoolers, including public schools, private schools, and residential child care institutions (RCCIs). School nutrition personnel may use this training program to count toward the annual training hours required by the USDA's Professional Standards for School Nutrition Program Professionals. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, [Professional Standards Topics and Training Hours for the Preschool Meal Pattern Training](#).

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# The School Lunch Tray: June 17, 2026

## Offer versus Serve (OVS) Requirements for Grades K-12 for School Year 2026-27

The CSDE's OVS resources for school year 2026-27 are now available. These documents provide guidance on OVS in the NSLP and SBP meal patterns for grades K-12. As applicable, updates include the requirements of the USDA final rule, [Expanding Fluid Milk Options in Child Nutrition Programs](#), effective June 8, 2026. The current versions are dated June 2026 and are available in the "[Implementation Guidance](#)" section or "[Required Signage for OVS](#)" section of the CSDE's Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs webpage.

- [Overview of Offer versus Serve \(OVS in the National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)\)](#)
- [Overview of Offer versus Serve \(OVS in the School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)\)](#)
- [Offer versus Serve Guide for School Meals](#)
- [Signage Requirements for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program](#)

For more information and resources, visit the CSDE's [Offer versus Serve for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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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\\_17\\_2026.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/slt/2026/slt_06_17_2026.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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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# INTRODUCTION TO SCHOOL NUTRITION LEADERSHIP Lite



**Virtual Training Program: August 4, 11, and 18, 2026  
8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. daily**

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) is hosting the Institute of Child Nutrition's (ICN) [Introduction to School Nutrition Leadership Lite](#). This three-day virtual training program is intended for new and aspiring school nutrition program directors. Lessons provide an overview of school nutrition programs, define the role and responsibilities of a director, and review the relationship between local policies and state/federal regulations. **This training is required for new school nutrition directors hired within the past year.**

## Registration

Register by **June 26, 2026**, at [Registration for Introduction to School Nutrition Leadership](#). There is no cost to attend but preregistration is required. **Attendees must be able to download all training materials. No hard copies will be mailed.**

## Additional Training Hours

The ICN strongly recommends that participants take an additional 17.5 hours of ICN iLearn online courses prior to the first training day. More information will be provided after participants register.

## Professional Standards

Key Areas: 1: Nutrition; 2: Operations, 3: Administration, and 4: Communications and Marketing

## Lesson Topics

- Program accountability, integrity, and the role of the director
- Reimbursable school meals
- Meal accommodations
- Food production and operation management
- Procurement and inventory management
- Customer experience, merchandising, and food presentation
- Human resource management
- Workplace safety
- Federal regulations
- Farm to School
- Effective goal setting using Smart Goals
- Marketing your school nutrition programs
- Essential Key Performance Indicators series
- Food Safety
- Designing an emergency preparedness plan

## More Details

- **Training link:** Attendees will receive the training link and applicable materials after registering.
- **CEUs:** 24.0 CEU hours
- **Questions?** Contact Erica Covington-Ford, ICN Training Coordinator, at [erica@theicn.org](mailto:erica@theicn.org).



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