

The School Lunch Tray: August 12, 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. 13-26: Connecticut School Meals: Readiness in School Everyday (RISE) for School Year (SY) 2026-27, Notice of Intent and Attestation Statement Due August 24, 2026
- SY 2026-27 Free and Reduced-Price Application Materials
- Buy Local Program Payment Requests Due August 15, 2026 
- CT Grown for CT Kids Week, October 5-9, 2026, Celebrating "Breakfast and Beyond – CT Fresh all Day Long" 

Need to Know

- Updated CSDE Training Program for School Year 2026-27: Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT
- Operational Memorandum No. 12-25: Federal Meal Reimbursement Rates for School Year (SY): July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026
- Updated List of Acceptable Food and Beverages Dated August 10, 2026

Good to Know

- Summer EBT Final Student Application Submission Date for Summer 2026: August 31, 2026

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Action Items

Operational Memorandum No. 13-26: Connecticut School Meals: Readiness in School Everyday (RISE) for School Year (SY) 2026-27, Notice of Intent and Attestation Statement Due August 24, 2026

[Operational Memorandum No. 13-26 Connecticut School Meals: Readiness in School Everyday \(RISE\) for school year \(SY\) 2026-27](#) provides important information about the RISE funds for SY 2026-27, including eligibility, payment calculations, use of funds, and the required Notice of Intent and Attestation. The Notice of Intent and Attestation must be completed by August 24, 2026. The CSDE is developing a series of Questions and Answers (Q&As) to provide additional clarification and guidance. The Q&As will be published soon.

SY 2026-27 Free and Reduced-Price Application Materials

The CSDE has posted the updated SY 2026-27 free and reduced-price application materials in the [“Application Forms”](#) section and [“Parent and Guardian Notification Letters”](#) section of the CSDE’s Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage. All forms are effective as of August 1, 2026. As a reminder, schools that participate in the Community Eligibility (CEP) provision must use the CSDE’s *Sample Press Release for the Community Eligibility Provision* and *Sample Letter to Households for the Community Eligibility Provision*. These documents are available in the [“Documents/Forms”](#) section of the CSDE’s CEP webpage.

For important training information addressing processing applications and conducting direct certification, refer to the CSDE’s training program, [Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT](#). These training modules are required for new direct certification contacts and determining officials and are encouraged for all sponsors.

- **How to Fill Out the Application Parent/Guardian Video:** The CSDE’s parent/guardian video, [How to Fill Out the Application for Free and Reduced-price Meals or Free Milk and Summer EBT](#), is a brief video helping parents and guardians complete the free and reduced-price application form. Sponsors are encouraged to provide a link to this video on the school or district’s website.
- **Public/Media Release:** The CSDE’s *Sample Public Media Release for Public School Sponsors of the Connecticut School Nutrition Programs* template is available under [Forms for School Nutrition Programs](#).
- **Web-based Applications:** Sponsors using web-based applications should review the CSDE’s document, [Requirements Before Implementing Web-based Applications](#). This

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guidance outlines key requirements for implementing web-based online free and reduced-price meal application systems.

- **S-EBT Guidance Document:** The CSDE's resource, [Student Eligibility for Free or Reduced-price Meal Benefits Through the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer \(S-EBT\) Program](#), clarifies student eligibility for free or reduced-price meals through S-EBT. Students eligible for S-EBT will also automatically qualify for free or reduced-price meals or free milk and will be listed on the Direct Certification S-EBT list with special codes. Note that S-EBT eligibility is not considered direct certification since the household submitted an application to the S-EBT team for review and approval. Please review this document carefully and share it with all relevant staff.
- **Direct Certification Rollover:** The direct certification initial match has been completed, and the data is available on the CSDE web application. For information regarding direct certification, refer to the "[Documents/Forms](#)" section of the CSDE's Direct Certification for School Nutrition Programs webpage and the CSDE's recently updated resource, [Important Reminders for Completing Direct Certification](#).
- **Addendum C:** The CSDE's [Addendum C: Information on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) will not be updated until the end of September.

Buy Local Program Payment Requests Due August 15, 2026



The next [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program Payment Request form](#) deadline is August 15, 2026. Please review the updated instructions in the form before completing and visit the CSDE's [Buy Local Program](#) website for updated BLP guidance, including the updated [CT Fresh Ed: Buy Local Program Questions and Answers](#) from May 2026.

The form currently accepts eligible purchases back to July 2025. Sponsors are encouraged to submit any purchases from prior periods by the August 15 or October 15 deadline as these payment requests may not/will not be allowed in future submissions.

Reminder: Minimally processed, multi-ingredient products (marinara sauce, salsa, yogurt, etc.) require documentation of the ingredient list to ensure eligibility with Buy Local Program guidelines.

Regional Farm to School Coordinators can help with product eligibility, identifying farms, BLP documentation and form submission. For questions about remaining BLP funds or the payment request form, please contact dawn.crayco@uconn.edu.

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CT Grown for CT Kids Week, October 5-9, 2026, Celebrating “Breakfast and Beyond – CT Fresh all Day Long”



CT Grown for CT Kids Week was established by legislation (Section 22-38d of the Connecticut General Statutes) and is celebrated annually during the first full week of October. This year's theme, “Breakfast and Beyond – CT Fresh all Day Long,” invites schools across the state to celebrate local food with a special focus on local at breakfast. Mark the calendar and join in the celebration!

This week is a time to recognize the essential role school nutrition professionals play in connecting students with fresh, locally grown food. The CSDE encourages all school food authorities (SFAs) to promote this local-focused week by featuring CT Grown foods on menus, hosting taste tests, spotlighting local farms, or incorporating educational elements in cafeterias. Participation can be as simple or creative as desired.

The breakfast-focused theme is especially relevant as school breakfast is available to all students at no charge this year. SFAs looking for assistance sourcing local items for breakfast or lunch or planning an activity should contact their Regional Coordinators. Please complete the [CT Grown for CT Kids Week Registration Form](#) for any schools planning on promoting CT Grown for CT Kids Week so CSDE can track the number of SFAs participating. Any school listed on a form submitted by September 1, 2026, will receive a CT Grown for CT Kids Week Kit.

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Need to Know

Updated CSDE Training Program for School Year 2026-27: Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT

The CSDE's training program, [Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT](#), is updated for school year 2026-27. The Determining Eligibility training program is a series of recorded modules that provide guidance on complying with the USDA regulations for determining a child's eligibility for:

- free or reduced-price meals or free milk in the school nutrition programs [National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of the NSLP, Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of the NSLP, and Special Milk Program (SMP);
- free meals in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP);
- and eligibility for the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program (S-EBT).

This training program is intended for the staff responsible for approving applications for free and reduced-price meals or free milk and conducting direct certification. New direct certification contacts and determining officials **must** take these trainings.

The included modules are listed below.

- Module 1: Introduction to Application Certification
- Module 2: Processing Applications Part 1 – Starting the Application Process
- Module 2: Processing Applications Part 2 – Receiving and Processing Applications
- Module 2: Processing Applications Part 3 – Reviewing Applications and Special Consideration
- Module 2: Processing Applications Part 4 – Notification, Documentation, and Final Steps
- Module 3: Direct Certification
- Module 4: Test Your Knowledge About Processing Applications
- Module 5: Confidentiality and Disclosure

Each module includes a handout of the content and a resource list.

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Operational Memorandum No. 12-25: Federal Meal Reimbursement Rates for School Year (SY): July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

[Operational Memorandum No. 12-26: Federal Meal Reimbursement Rates for School Year \(SY\): July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027](#) summarizes the annual adjustments to the federal reimbursement rates for local educational agencies for lunches, breakfasts, afterschool snacks, and milk served to students participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), School Breakfast Program, Afterschool Snack Program, and Special Milk Program; and the NSLP reimbursement rate for USDA donated foods for SY 2026-27. This memorandum is also available in the “[CSDE Memos](#)” section of the CSDE’s Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs webpage. Please review and share with appropriate staff.

Updated List of Acceptable Food and Beverages Dated August 10, 2026

Updated lists of foods that comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards (CNS) and beverages that comply with the state beverage statute are now available on the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage.

- **New products** on the lists are indicated by pink highlighting on the manufacturer and product name.
- Items that have been **added or deleted** since the last update are listed on the CSDE’s [Summary of Updates to Approved Food and Beverages](#). **Note:** This summary includes only the changes since the last update; it is not a complete listing of all allowable products. For the complete list, visit the CSDE’s [List of Acceptable Foods and Beverages](#) webpage.

Healthy Food Certification (HFC) schools must check that commercial foods and beverages are listed before they are sold to students. For additional guidance, refer to the CSDE’s resource, [How to Evaluate Commercial Food Products for Compliance with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards](#), and visit the “[Evaluating Foods for CNS Compliance](#)” section of the CSDE’s CNS webpage.

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Good to Know

Summer EBT Final Student Application Submission Date for Summer 2026: August 31, 2026

A reminder that the 2026 Summer EBT (S-EBT) program will be concluding on August 31, 2026. No applications for the S-EBT benefits will be accepted for summer 2026 after this date. However, applications will continue to be accepted for consideration for summer 2027. Approved applications may be used to determine a student's eligibility for free or reduced-price meals if certain federal guidelines are met. For additional information about S-EBT, visit the [Summer EBT](#) 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_08_12_2026.pdf.



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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
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