

Professional Standards Topics and Training Hours for the Determining Eligibility Training Modules

School Year 2025-26

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) final rule, [Professional Standards for State and Local School Nutrition Programs Personnel as Required by the HHFKA of 2010](#), requires minimum education standards and annual training standards for school nutrition professionals who manage and operate the [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#) and [School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)](#). These standards ensure that school nutrition personnel have the knowledge, training, and tools needed to plan, prepare, and purchase healthy products to create nutritious, safe, and enjoyable school meals. This document summarizes the training hours and professional standards topics provided by the CSDE's training program, [Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT](#).

Training Description

The CSDE's *Determining Eligibility* training program is a series of recorded modules that provide guidance on complying with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations for determining a child's eligibility for free or reduced-price meals or free milk in the school nutrition programs, free meals in the [Summer Food Service Program \(SFSP\)](#), and eligibility for the [Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer Program \(S-EBT\)](#). The school nutrition programs include the [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#), [School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)](#), [Afterschool Snack Program \(ASP\)](#) of NSLP, [Seamless Summer Option \(SSO\)](#) of the NSLP, and [Special Milk Program \(SMP\)](#).

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.

USDA Key Areas and Training Topics

The CSDE's *What's in a Meal* training program meets the USDA's Professional Standards training topics for the key areas of 3000 Free and Reduced Price Meal Benefits and 2000 Operations. Training topics for these key areas are indicated below:

- 3110 Eligibility
- 3120 Direct Certification
- 3130 Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)
- 2200 SERVING FOOD: 2220 Offer versus Serve

Table 1 summarizes the specific Professional Standards training topics addressed in each module.

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Training Hours

Completing all modules of the CSDE's *Determining Eligibility* training program provides **4.5 training hours** toward the annual training requirements of the USDA's Professional Standards. Training hours for each individual module are rounded down to the nearest 15-minute increment. Participants who complete only some modules will receive the specific number of training hours listed for each module in table 1 below. For example, a participant who completes all four parts of module 2 earns 1 training hour.

Table 1: Professional Standards Contribution of CSDE's Determining Eligibility Training Modules

Module	Training hours	Description
1: Introduction to Application Certification 29 minutes	0.25	This module introduces the training modules, provides an overview of the application process, identifies important terms and documents, and highlights relevant resources for managing requirements and deadlines.
2: Processing Applications Part 1 – Starting the Application Process 22 minutes	0.25	This module reviews information about starting the application process for free and reduced-price meals or free milk, or free Summer Meals, or S-EBT eligibility. Topics include common acronyms and abbreviations for processing applications, flagging applications based on the different types of eligibility, error-prone applications, the requirements for notifying households about the application certification process, and the required addenda to include with the annual application materials.
2: Processing Applications Part 2 – Receiving and Processing Applications 23 minutes	0.25	This module reviews the requirements for receiving and processing for free and reduced-price applications. Topics include the local educational agency's system for receiving applications, processing timeframes, carryover of eligibility, transfer of eligibility, point of service, and how to determine if an application is complete.
2: Processing Applications Part 3 – Reviewing Applications and Special Considerations 26 minutes	0.25	This module reviews the requirements for reviewing free and reduced-price applications. Topics includes how to calculate income, foster children, handwritten case numbers, the accountability of the determining official, and the requirements for web-based applications.

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Module	Training hours	Description
2: Processing Applications Part 4 – Notification, Documentation, and Final Steps 27 minutes	0.25	This module reviews the requirements for notification, documentation, and final steps for processing free and reduced-priced applications. Topics includes notifying households about eligibility status, verification for cause, the benefit issuance document, the claims consolidation process, independent review of applications, records retention, appeal procedures, and civil rights.
3: Direct Certification 41 minutes	0.5	This module reviews the requirements for the direct certification process, including the types of direct certification, hierarchy of eligibility, CSDE's Direct Certification Web Application, direct certification of foster children, and records retention for direct certification.
Knowledge Check for Module 3: Direct Certification DC or Not DC 9 minutes	0	This module is the knowledge check for Module 3: Direct Certification, DC or Not DC. This quiz tests participants' knowledge about direct certification.
4: Test Your Knowledge About Processing Applications 31 minutes plus 30 minutes for worksheet	1.0	This module provides an activity to test participants' knowledge about processing applications by reviewing seven examples of a completed Application for Free and Reduced-price School Meals or Free Milk and S-EBT. This module is based on the information provided in modules 1-3.
5: Confidentiality and Disclosure 21 minutes	0.25	This module reviews the confidentiality requirements for directly certifying students and processing applications, including preventing overt identification of students' eligibility status and restrictions for disclosing student's personal information.

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Resources

Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs, Summer Food Service Program, and S-EBT (CSDE):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/determining-eligibility-training>

Guide to Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs (USDA):

https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/Professional_Standards_Guide.pdf

Professional Standards (USDA webpage):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/professional-standards>

Professional Standards for School Nutrition Professionals (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/professional-standards-for-school-nutrition-professionals>

Professional Standards Learning Objectives & Training Topics (USDA webpage):

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/professional-standards/training-objectives-topics>

USDA final rule, Professional Standards for State and Local School Nutrition Programs Personnel as Required by the HHFKA of 2010:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/fr-030215>

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For more information, visit the “[Determining Eligibility Training](#)” section of the CSDE’s Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs 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/training/determiningeligibility/determining_eligibility_meeting_usda_professional_standards.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

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