CONNECTICUT Education

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

Module 1: Introduction to Application Certification

Connecticut State Department of Education
Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs
Revised August 2026

Purpose of Training

- How to determine child's eligibility for
  - free or reduced-price meals or free milk in school nutrition programs
  - free meals in Summer Food Service Program
- How S-EBT impacts free and reduced-price eligibility for school and summer meals



Connecticut State Department of Education

About This Training

- Reflects USDA regulations and requirements
- Current as of date indicated at beginning of video



Connecticut State Department of Education

Applies to Staff Responsible for

- Approving household applications
- Conducting direct certification



Connecticut State Department of Education

Applicable Child Nutrition Programs

- School nutrition programs
- Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)
- Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (S-EBT)



Connecticut State Department of Education

School Nutrition Programs

- National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
- School Breakfast Program (SBP)
- Afterschool Snack Program (ASP) of NSLP
- Seamless Summer Option (SSO) of NSLP
- Special Milk Program (SMP)



Connecticut State Department of Education

Introduction to Training Modules

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

Recommendation

- View in order



Where to Find Training Modules

- CSDE webpage: Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs
  - Determining Eligibility Training section



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

Objectives

- How to process applications
- How to complete direct certification
- How to ensure confidentiality and proper disclosure of eligibility
- Identify resources for guidance and training



Resources and websites are listed in the yellow bar

Information About Resources

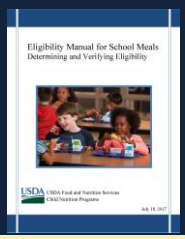
- Resources and websites listed in yellow bar at bottom of screen
- Available list of each resources and links for each module



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

USDA's Eligibility Manual for School Meals

- Latest version dated July 18, 2017
- CSDE training modules do not cover all areas
- Sponsors must fully implement all requirements



https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/usda_eligibility_manual.pdf

Terms to Know

Connecticut State Department of Education

Terms to Know: Administrative Authorities



Connecticut State Department of Education



Terms to Know

Local Educational Agency (LEA)

A public board of education or other public or private nonprofit authority within a state that maintains administrative control of public or private nonprofit elementary or secondary schools

Connecticut State Department of Education



Terms to Know

School Food Authority (SFA)

The governing body that is responsible for the administration of one or more schools and has the legal authority to operate one or more of the USDA's school nutrition programs

Connecticut State Department of Education



Terms to Know

Sponsor

A public, private nonprofit, or for-profit organization that is approved by the CSDE to operate a USDA Child Nutrition Program

Connecticut State Department of Education

Terms to Know: Staff



Connecticut State Department of Education



Determining Official (DO)

Person designated by LEA to review and approve free and reduced meal or free milk applications

Connecticut State Department of Education



Verifying Official (VO)

Person designated by LEA to conduct the verification process for the selected households

- Not required for SMP

Connecticut State Department of Education



Direct Certification Contact

Person designated by LEA to have access to the CSDE's direct certification application webpage

Connecticut State Department of Education



Hearing Officer

Person designated by LEA to conduct a fair hearing if a parent or guardian requests it

Connecticut State Department of Education

Quick Quiz Question 1

- Can the determining official and verifying official be the same person?

  Yes



Connecticut State Department of Education

Quick Quiz Question 2

- Can the determining official and verifying official also be the hearing official?

  No



Connecticut State Department of Education

Term to Know: Days



Connecticut State Department of Education



Terms to Know

Operating Days

Days on which reimbursable meals or free milk are provided

Connecticut State Department of Education



Terms to Know

Calendar Days

Number of days represented on the calendar

Connecticut State Department of Education



Terms to Know

Working Days

Days when school is open and teachers or school administration are on site, but the reimbursable meal or free milk service is not operating

Connecticut State Department of Education

Terms to Know: Household Applications



Connecticut State Department of Education



Terms to Know

Household (HH)

A group of related or nonrelated individuals who are living as one economic unit

- "Family" has same definition (7 CFR Part 245.2)

Connecticut State Department of Education



Economic Unit

A group of related or unrelated individuals who are not residents of an institution or boarding house but who are living as one economic unit, and whose members share housing, significant income, and expenses

- Individuals residing in same house/apartment
- More than one economic unit may reside together
- Separate economic units in same residence characterized by prorating expenses and by economic independence

Connecticut State Department of Education



Income Eligibility Guidelines (IEG)

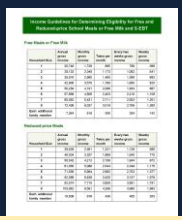
USDA guidelines that determine eligibility of participants for free and reduced-price meals or free milk in the school nutrition programs, free meals in the SFSP, and eligibility for S-EBT

- DO must use IEG to review income application and determine student's eligibility

Connecticut State Department of Education

Where to Find IEGs

- CSDE Resource: Income Guidelines for Determining Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price School Meals or Free Milk and S-EBT
- Download current year's guidelines



https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/income-guidelines-for-child-nutrition-programs/income-guidelines-for-school-nutrition-programs

Connecticut State Department of Education



Direct Certification (DC)

The process of determining children eligible for free or reduced-price meals or free milk benefits who are not subject to verification

Connecticut State Department of Education



Verification

Confirmation of eligibility for free or reduced-price benefits in the NSLP or SBP

Connecticut State Department of Education

More Information About Verification

CSDE Training Module

- Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs



https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/verification-procedures-for-school-nutrition-programs/verification-training

Connecticut State Department of Education

Forms for Application Certification

Connecticut State Department of Education

Overview of Application Certification Forms

- Application for Free and Reduced-price School Meals or Free Milk
- Parent Letter: Frequently Asked Questions About Free and Reduced-price School Meals in the NSLP and SBP
- Public Media Release
- Parent/Guardian Notification Letter (approving/denying meals/milk)
- Parent/Guardian Notification Letter of Direct Certification: Version 1
- Parent/Guardian Notification letter of Direct Certification: Version 2
- Parent/Guardian Notification letter of Direct Certification: Version 3

Connecticut State Department of Education

Family Application

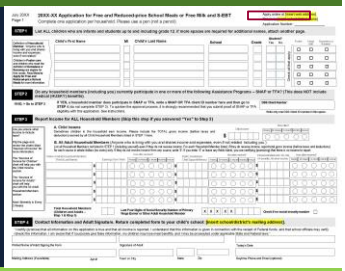
- Application for Free and Reduced-price School Meals or Free Milk and S-EBT
  - CSDE's template application contains required language



Connecticut State Department of Education

Review and Complete All Yellow Highlighted Areas

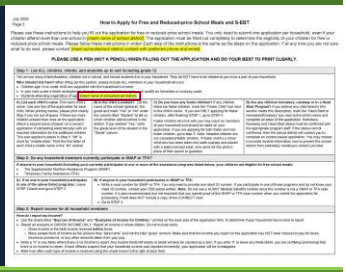
- Information specific to district
  - Example: For web-based applications, include web address



Connecticut State Department of Education

Example: Completing Information on Page 3

- Review and complete all yellow highlighted areas
  - Name of school/district
  - Contact with preferred phone and email
  - Name of school/district



Connecticut State Department of Education

Frequently Asked Questions About Free and Reduced-price School Meals in the NSLP and SBP (FAQ Letter)

- Explains Child Nutrition Programs
- Provides pricing information
- Answers common questions



Connecticut State Department of Education

FAQ Parent Letter for NSLP and SBP

- Includes reduced-price IEG
- Cannot include free IEG



Connecticut State Department of Education

FAQ Parent Letter for SMP

- Includes free IEG

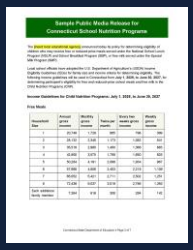


https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/special-milk-program/forms#ParentLetterFAQ

Connecticut State Department of Education

Public Media Release

- Must send at beginning of school year
- Includes current IEG
- Updated annually
  - Refer to current school year's version for most recent information

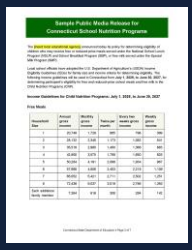

Sample Public Media Release for Connecticut School Nutrition Programs

Connecticut State Department of Education

Must Send Public Media Release To

- News media outlets
- Local unemployment office
- Major employers contemplating layoffs

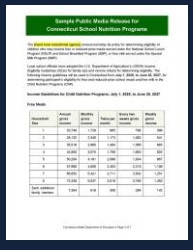
Not required to pay to publish


Sample Public Media Release for Connecticut School Nutrition Programs

Connecticut State Department of Education

Update Public Media Release as Needed

- Focus on yellow highlighted areas specific to each LEA


Sample Public Media Release for Connecticut School Nutrition Programs

Connecticut State Department of Education

Parent/Guardian Notification Letter for Free/Reduced-price Eligibility

- Approving/denying benefits for meals or milk
- Updated annually
  - Refer to current school year's version for most recent information
- Two categories for approval based on S-EBT


Parent/Guardian Notification Letter for Free/Reduced-price Eligibility

Connecticut State Department of Education

Two S-EBT Parent/Guardian Notification Letters for Free/Reduced-price Eligibility

- Free
- Reduced price
- Updated annually
  - Refer to current school year's version for most recent information





Connecticut State Department of Education

Direct Certification Parent/Guardian Notification Letters

- **Version 1:** Eligibility Established through Direct Certification Based on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) or HUSKY A (Medicaid) Benefits
- **Version 2:** Eligibility Established through Direct Certification Based on Foster Child, Homeless, Runaway, or Head Start Program Status
- **Version 3:** Reduced-price Eligibility Established through Direct Certification Based on Medicaid benefits
- Updated annually
  - Refer to current school year's version for most recent information

Connecticut State Department of Education

Parent/Guardian Notification Letter for Direct Certification: Version 1

- Eligibility Established through Direct Certification Based on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) or HUSKY A (Medicaid) Benefits



Connecticut State Department of Education

Parent/Guardian Notification Letter for Direct Certification: Version 2

- Eligibility Established through Direct Certification Based on Foster Child, Homeless, Runaway, or Head Start Program Status



Connecticut State Department of Education

Parent/Guardian Notification Letter for Direct Certification: Version 3

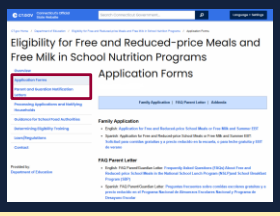
- Reduced-price Eligibility Established through Direct Certification Based on Medicaid Benefits



Connecticut State Department of Education

Where to Find Application Forms

- CSDE webpage: Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage
  - Application Forms section
  - Parent and Guardian Notification Letters section



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

Connecticut State Department of Education

Additional Requirements for Application Forms

LEAs must

- comply with USDA's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) requirements
- ensure locally developed forms comply with the federal regulations for the Child Nutrition Programs



Connecticut State Department of Education



Terms to Know

Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

Individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English

Connecticut State Department of Education

USDA Regulations Section 7 CFR 245.6(a)(2): Determining Eligibility for Free And Reduced Price Meals and Free Milk

- Any communication with households for eligibility determination purposes must be in an understandable and uniform format and to the maximum extent practicable, in a language that parents and guardians can understand

https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-7/part-245#p-245.6(a)(2)

Connecticut State Department of Education

Provide Application Materials in Appropriate Languages

- LEAs that participate in Child Nutrition Programs must take reasonable steps to ensure meaningful access to their programs and activities by LEP individuals
- DOs must assess local needs and provide appropriate translated forms and documents



Connecticut State Department of Education

More Information About LEP

- CSDE webpage: Civil Rights for Child Nutrition Programs
  - Limited English Proficiency (LEP) section



https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/civil-rights-for-child-nutrition-programs/civil-rights-for-school-nutrition-programs#LEP

Connecticut State Department of Education

Locally Developed Forms

- Must comply with USDA regulations
  - Includes forms generated by LEA's computer software program
- Use CSDE templates
  - Compare software program forms with CSDE templates



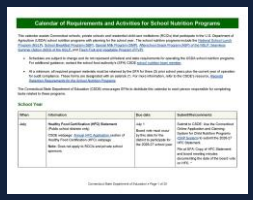
Connecticut State Department of Education

Resources for Managing Requirements and Deadlines

Connecticut State Department of Education

School Year Calendar of Required Activities ad Deadlines

- CSDE resource: Calendar of Requirements and Activities for School Nutrition Programs

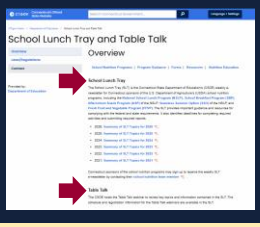

Calendar of Requirements and Activities for School Nutrition Programs

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/snp_calendar.pdf

Connecticut State Department of Education

CSDE Webpage: School Lunch Tray and Table Talk

- Resource for managing requirements and deadlines
- Weekly electronic newsletter emailed to sponsors on Wednesdays


School Lunch Tray and Table Talk
Overview

https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/school-lunch-tray-and-table-talk

Connecticut State Department of Education

Questions? Contact CSDE's School Nutrition Programs Staff

- CSDE Resource: County Assignments for School Nutrition Programs

CONNECTICUT Education



https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/cnstaff/countyassign.pdf

Connecticut State Department of Education

Thanks for participating!

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

Connecticut State Department of Education

USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

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

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Connecticut State Department of Education


CSDE Nondiscrimination Statement
The Connecticut State Department of Education is committed to a policy of equal opportunity/affirmative action for all qualified persons. The Connecticut Department of Education does not discriminate in any employment practice, education program, or educational activity on the basis of race; color; religious creed; age; sex; pregnancy; sexual orientation; workplace hazards to reproductive systems, gender identity or expression; marital status; national origin; ancestry; retaliation for previously opposed discrimination or coercion, intellectual disability; genetic information; learning disability; physical disability (including, but not limited to, blindness); mental disability (past/present history thereof); military or veteran status; status as a victim of domestic violence; or criminal record in state employment, unless there is a bona fide occupational qualification excluding persons in any of the aforementioned protected classes. Inquiries regarding the Connecticut State Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to: Attorney Louis Todisco, Connecticut State Department of Education, by mail 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103-1841; or by telephone 860-713-6594; or by email louis.todisco@ct.gov.
Connecticut State Department of Education