

## School Lunch Tray Table Talk Transcript: April 8, 2021

**Presenters/Attendees:** Speaker 1 – Shannon Yearwood, Speaker 2 – Susan Fiore, Speaker 3 – Teri Dandeneau, Speaker 4, Terese Maineri, Speaker 5 – Monica Pacheco, Speaker 6 – Fionnuala Brown, Sean Fogarty, Caroline Cooke, Susan Alston, Michelle Rosado (Hostess)

0:04

Speaker 1 - Hi everybody and welcome to today's School Lunch Tray Table Talk brought to you by the Connecticut State Department of Education's Child Nutrition Programs Unit.

0:14

I'm Shannon Yearwood, the Education Manager with the Child Nutrition programs, and I'm joined by my amazing team of colleagues here to help answer your questions, provide you some more information about what we sent out to you yesterday in the School Lunch Tray. We'll take a deeper dive into that.

0:29

Keep in mind, this acts like our office hours, so if you have questions, whether you submitted them ahead of time, whether they pertain to the topics that are contained in the School Lunch Tray, ask away.

0:39

We are, we are here to help you, um, certainly enter those questions into the question box as you go, and we will, if we can't answer those right now, or if they're individualized, we will reach out to you, um to be able to work with you, right, with technical assistance.

0:55

So we also, just to mention ahead of time, we know a lot of you are on spring break next week, or the following week, and two, help you enjoy your spring break.

1:05

We are taking a break from Table Talk for those two weeks, so you don't have to feel any pressure while you're on vacation, that you might be missing out on something. We will still be sending out the school lunch tray, you'll still have the information.

1:17

And anything that really needs that deeper dive, we'll cover in the subsequent uh table talk. So don't worry, you're not missing out. Please enjoy your vacations if you actually get them, and you get to take a break.

1:28

If you don't take a break. Enjoy some quiet time to catch up.

1:32

Well the kids out of your schools, and uh otherwise, get out and try this weather today.

1:37

But before you listen to this great table talk, I'm going to go ahead and hand it off to my team. And I believe you are up first today. Speaker 2 - I am up first today. Hi, everybody.

1:49

So the first update is about our list of acceptable foods and beverages, which was revised just recently and sent out to everybody this week. And just as a friendly reminder, it's bid season, and

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some of you may be getting your bids ready to send out to vendors, and taking a look at the types of food products that they have available to you. So just as a reminder, when you are getting information from vendors about food products, please double-check and make sure that those items are on the list. Sometimes we see vendors that compile a list of food items, that they uh recommend to you, and they might indicate that they meet the standards, and those might not all be on the list. So again, you do want to double-check and make sure that those are there for you. The, uh the update in, this has a summary of the foods that have changed since last time and it's been awhile since we updated the list with all the craziness around COVID during this past year. So you will see that summary right there in in the middle of the blurb on the acceptable foods and beverages list. But when you what you want to click into...Fionnuala, and maybe if we can just click into the list, not, not the summary, but the list right up at the top of the page.

3:02

Yep, right there. Just as a reminder, that on the page here, if we scroll down a little bit, you're going to see some resources here, if you can stop right here.

3:13

There's some information on the list, gives you some guidelines as to what they are, what they contain, and then if you click on list updates, in the blue box, that'll bring us right down to the most recent updates, as well as some information on how to submit products for review to the Department of Education, and then you'll see the actual list of all the foods and beverages. So again, those have been updated as of April 5<sup>th</sup>. Feel free to send any new products my way. And, again, remind your vendors, as well, to send information to me, so that I can review them, and get them up on the list.

3:48

And with that, I will turn it over, I believe, to Teri for the next item on our School Lunch Tray.

3:57

Speaker 3 - Thanks, Susan. Hi, everyone. Hope you're all doing well.

4:02

I am going to talk very briefly about the Professional Standards section that was part of the School Lunch Tray and USDA has a tracking tool that we want to remind you about, and they also have training resources.

4:17

Um, if you have not been tracking your professional standards, you are required to do so.

4:22

You can use your own tracking tool as long as it has all of the required components or USDA has one and so you want to definitely check it out. There's a link there that you can go to.

4:32

I checked it out yesterday and it seems to be relatively easy to use, you do have to get authenticated, and which is, they have a little webinar on how to do that.

4:44

So that's an easy process and I think if you are using the food buying guide, um you also probably have already been authenticated.

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4:53

There's also some great resources there, so, if you're overwhelmed and we know that you are, and you haven't been thinking about this, um check out the resources.

5:01

It gives you an overview of the CEUs that are required for the different levels and staff that you have, and um that would be very helpful for you to take a look at.

5:12

So just wanted to um mention that. So if you have any questions, you can put them into the question portion.

5:21

Thank you, and I think I'm handing it over to Shannon.

5:25

Speaker 1 - Here I am. Thanks so much, Teri

5:27

I know, I use our tool, our professional standards trading tool tracker quite often. So it's a great way to keep track of those hours that you need.

5:37

Um so as we talked about last week Pandemic EBT and we've talked about it for a couple of weeks I guess, um is ready to roll out. So, the first benefit waves will be um loaded up on cards.

5:52

This weekend, I believe. So, you will likely start hearing from folks next week or the week after, who may have questions about benefits.

6:00

Um, who might have individual household changes they need, certainly, check out the Department of Social Services, P-EBT website. This is where you will, you'll see this press release so that has gone out.

6:15

Official, Pandemic EBT is here and we are working on those resources for you to help navigate some of those questions you're going to hear out in the field.

6:26

The first resource we have is just for you at the school level and that's the Pandemic EBT, quick facts. So Fionnuala, if you could just click on that. Thank you.

6:34

You knew where I was going with that, so, this is really just a quick guide for some of your more commonly experienced questions you will likely receive. Um and so, this hopefully will be a good tool for you to just answer those basic questions. If your households have more individualized questions, you can certainly um help connect them to the Department of Social Services who can look into individual cases with that benefit. So, just know we will probably be reaching out to you. This is definitely a big program and it relies very heavily on the data provided from the school district. So, um just keep this in mind and make sure that you bookmark that P-EBT page. We will be uploading up some question and answers.

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7:17

Some decision making tree flowchart to help you be able to navigate any of those questions both at, for your School Food Authority offices and also your central office.

7:27

So, we don't recommend sending this out to households as a standalone right now until those other resources are ready if you need to um for families that you have spoken to, certainly do that. But without context, it may be a little bit too confusing. So this is really a resource that's meant to help you navigate some of those questions that you'll likely receive as this program rolls out.

7:50

Um, so we can go back and that's pretty much what I wanted to say to you today about Pandemic EBT, but keep your eyes out for more resources. We are furiously developing those as we go, and if you're curious about our proposal, you can look at the, I believe its two weeks ago School Lunch Tray.

8:06

You can check out our awesome page on the School Lunch Tray under our training resources on the Department of Education's website and under Program guidance, and so that can also help you navigate some of those questions received around pandemic.

8:23

So with that, I'm going to hand it off to Terese, who's going to talk about our next item.

8:29

Speaker 4 - Hi, Good afternoon everybody. So, I'm here to talk about the Food Solutions of New England is hosting their annual 21 Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge, the challenge starting on April 5<sup>th</sup>, but it runs until the 20<sup>th</sup>.

8:46

The challenges are great way to learn about the history and the impacts of racism on the current fluid system or providing participants resources that the tools that they can use in their daily lives. So it's not too late to sign up, the lessons are provided by e-mail. Every day it provides some information to reflect on. And when you register, I believe you can access the past daily reflections on them participating in the challenge since the beginning. And really found it informative and useful in terms of the work that we do.

9:23

I think I'll pass it on to Monica?

9:29

Speaker 5 – Yes, Terese, thank you.

9:32

So I'm going to just take a minute to talk about some information recently put out by USDA. They've created a Farm to School Census and Comprehensive Review webpage, and the link is right there in our School Lunch Tray.

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9:45

And basically they're getting ready to put out the results of the most recent Farm to School Census despite some of the, uh, craziness of this past year and all their, they're getting ready to send to get out that information.

9:59

And also they have two reports that are currently posted in this webpage. The first is a Farm to School literature review. And what they've done is they've summarized findings from published research on farm to school from 2010 to present. So this is quite a comprehensive review.

10:17

Um, it finds it provides findings and even analyzes some of the gaps and available knowledge and data that is related to Farm to School policy and funding at the State and local level, Farm to School activities, local procurement practices and challenges, and the impact of Farm to School on local Economy. So um it also includes, in one of the appendixes, a report on interviews done with School Food Distributors' that they did back in 2019.

10:45

The other report that is also include, there is the Farm to School Grantee report. Many of you know and many in some of you who have availed yourselves of the USDA Farm to School grant that is offered annually.

10:56

And they have um 365 of the grantees who received the grant between fiscal year 2013 to 2017. And they are required if you've received a grant, to provide some information, so there are baseline progress and final reports that are submitted. So, they were able to pull information from all these reports to provide information on achievements, challenges, and lessons learned. So again, a great document, in this beautiful weather, everyone's starting to think more of spring and with spring comes more local and Farm to School.

11:32

So, it seems so timely point of our day and our year to have this information available. And even better than that, both of these reports have two page summary is also provided. So, uh both the reports are rather extensive, but if you want to get just a quick idea of what the information looks like, they have provided nice summaries. But I do encourage you to make sure you keep this information handy. It may not be something that you're reading through right away, but certainly if you're thinking of Farm to School planning in the future, there may be some great information in these two documents that could assist you, and I'd be happy to help you as well, if you're looking for information in those.

12:09

Um, and that's it for me.

12:15

Speaker 1 - Thank you so much, Monica.

12:17

So, you guys have me, again, we are going to talk a little bit more about SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

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12:24

So, every year, USDA released a report that really, kind of, gives an overview of, who is using SNAP, the rates, and, really, what the demographics of SNAP are. So, just some quick highlights, because I'm sure you're wondering, what does this have to do with us we're schools?

12:43

Well, most of you are aware that Direct Certification and SNAP are extremely important, and, there, we're really relying on that relationship right now through that broad based categorical eligibility. I am tongue tied again today, um and so what we know is that a lot of you have either not been able to collect those eligibility applications, price meals because of the way that you're operating summer meals during the school year this year.

13:16

And so really SNAP and some of the other programs that confer Direct Certification for free or reduced price meals, too.

13:24

Students is extremely important, and so, this report, I think, really highlights the importance of having that school based outreach. You really are a trusted partner in this.

13:35

You are a trusted resource to households, sending out information around SNAP and making sure that households who may be eligible, are knowledgeable about how they may be able to apply, is going to help the households, the community, and your students, um and definitely your programs.

13:51

So, just a few different highlights I wanted to point out from this report is that 43% of SNAP participants, participants in fiscal year 2019, were children. That's almost half of all SNAP recipients are children.

14:04

That's why it matters to you, um, the, the, nearly one third of SNAP households in fiscal year 2019, um had earnings. And so, one of the common myths about SNAP is that you may not be able to work and still qualify for SNAP, and that is not true.

14:26

SNAP is the supplemental nutrition program that is supposed to help supplement your nutrition budget for your household.

14:35

And so, on, most households that, that are, there are SNAP work requirements, and most households are really also earning.

14:45

And so, of the households that have earned income, more than half of those households with children also had incomes from earnings.

14:54

So, when we live in a state like Connecticut, where the cost of living can be much higher, and these are federal level benefits with federal income thresholds that are meant to fit all states and territories, we know that the SNAP benefits go really long way in Connecticut. So, continue the

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great work you're doing out there to make sure that your households know about this program. It's hard to help them understand about the connection to school meals outside of.

15:17

It will really just help your child not have to turn in more paperwork and low, still receive free or reduced price meal, will free up for, for SNAP. But, really make sure that your households have this, we know we said you send it out with the income eligibility applications, but promoting it, and making sure that people know how to access it, is only going to help your program. So that's going to help those households.

15:39

So, with that, those were, those are really the highlights around kids and children in households receiving SNAP. There are some really other compelling facts in there. I highly recommend that you check it out. It's pretty quick snapshot of what, what those demographics were in Fiscal Year 2019.

15:56

So, uh certainly want to thank you for your work on that as well, and I think, right now, I'm done.

16:02

And we're gonna, we're gonna whip through this Table Talk before we head to the Resource Roundup. I was kidding, I'm not done. We're going to jump to questions. We did have one question submitted ahead of time, so I'm gonna go ahead and ask that now, and then if you're going to jump on and help answer that.

16:19

Yeah.

16:20

So our question is, since we are already operating under the Seamless Summer Option at the National School Lunch Program, we just need to update Colyar for additional service days for July and August, or will there be a more extensive summer meal application process for the upcoming?

16:38

Speaker 6 - Okay, so, um, I'm not on mute anymore. No, I'm not. So the answer to that is, we are working through what the procedures will be and we will share that information with sponsors in the near future. We're certainly going to look at the most efficient way for you to be able to submit an application if necessary to be able to operate for the summer months. So, no information to send down yet and we're developing that.

17:07

Speaker 1 - Great. Thank you so much Fionnuala, and that actually gives me a good opportunity to just remind folks that you know, we, we, USDA has indicated that we will be receiving some guidance soon or the for the upcoming school year.

17:22

So hopefully we'll be able to receive that and send it out.

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17:25

Um we anticipate that there will be additional guidance around this summer coming up as well so we will certainly make that available, but, what we know is, with all of the program integrity requirements that we have for program compliance, we also have to report on everything that we are doing, and since this unprecedented, how are able to operate these programs, we have to collect quite a bit of data from the field.

17:50

So our team is very dedicated to trying to make sure that we don't um create too much administrative burden for you, but we do, we are accountable to USDA to be able to help them understand the effectiveness of these waivers and the impact that they've had. So, we do have to take that very seriously. We need to take that into consideration. So, when we send out requests for data, when we ask you for additional information, just know, it's because we need to, in order to ensure that these programs are operating and within the allowable parameters.

18:25

Um, definitely, we don't want to create any more paperwork for you or for us. So we are, we take that very seriously. We know how hard this is on the ground right now, so thank you for what you're doing.

18:36

Um, I am, that was our only question we had submitted ahead of time, and I just want to remind folks, in every school lunch tray that that link is there for you to submit questions, it doesn't timeout, ask away.

18:47

We have a few that were submitted right in the middle of the night, and that is exactly what it's there for. So when you have something on your mind, shoot us a question, and we will either cover it on Table Talk, or we'll reach out to you and provide technical assistance.

18:59

In the meantime, I'm not seeing any other questions in the in the question box, so certainly make sure you enter those in after a resource rounds up. That's our final our final piece for the School Lunch Tray table talk. So, we'll end early if we if we have no more questions if we have questions, we know that for the good of the group, so certainly don't be shy about asking.

19:19

And with that, I really will hand it back off to you now. Thanks, Fionnuala.

19:24

Speaker 6 - Okay, thanks, Shannon. So, we just wanted to take an opportunity um now, in April, just to highlight a presentation that we've put together for the SNACT Conference January 14<sup>th</sup> of this year. So certainly a few months ago, but the information is all still pertinent. So if you have an opportunity, if you miss that, during the SNACT Conference, this information is available on the links here.

19:57

Hmm, hmm, hmm, hmm, strange, but so you do.



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20:04

Let me hand, so what we have here, is actually the, not the recording. We have the presentation itself here, linked, I'm going to show you two other items.

20:16

I thought I had another Lunch Tray open. So this presentation is great, and when we have the recording on our training site, our training webpage is about an hour and a half into snacks, entire programming that we took an hour and a half and spoke about overcoming the challenges of feeding during the pandemic. And really, uh some great information was gathered by the team and presented on how to increase participation, uh a number of ways to uh, to implement some strategies with that. And we know many of you who've been implementing that over the past few months, and we know things have changed now with your models, with school, so, again, it's probably worth listening to the recording if you, if you missed it.

21:05

Um and, and also, um Teri provided some great information about increasing revenue. Some great ideas that she pulled from our National Conference that she was at and she presented.

21:17

So if you haven't um seen it, um there is a recording, and I thought I was going to be showing that to you, but I must not have the correct one open. So I apologize, but the link in the School Lunch Tray is directly to the uh presentation.

21:39

Um, Susan Fiore you don't have the other one open do you, no, okay.

21:42

Speaker 2 - I don't, but they can access it from the training page Fionnuala. Speaker 6 – Okay. Speaker 2 - But they can access it from the training page Fionnuala.

22:00

Speaker 6 - You can see it, so it would be um, it will be under training, yep. So go to T, yeah. So, I just went to program guidance clicked T for training and I'm at the training page. And so, this is where under the National School Lunch Program, we have.

22:31

Here is the presentation for SSO, which will be under the National School Lunch Program, and then, we also spoke about um SFSP. So, not only do we talk about increasing participation and increasing uh revenue. We went over some regulations, just a brief overview of the regulations uh around reminders for SSO and SFSP.

22:54

And that is here and, and it is listed both um under SFSP and NSLP. And so the slides are available. Thank you so much, Susan Fiore, and then, um the presentation will link right to the, to the um, to the YouTube.

23:14

And as we said, if you click into about uh hour and 30 minutes in, you'll get to our presentation.

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23:23

Just because, um, I think it's great because you could be doing something else and kind of listening, right, so to have their recording, there's is certainly beneficial um as another means to get the information.

23:36

So that was what we were highlighting today as a resource for our Resource Roundup, and, um, that's all I have.

23:50

Speaker 1 - Okay, thank you, so, that was a great, you stop, the video on our Fearless Leaders picture, Division Director, John Frassinelli. Um he sends his regards to everybody, and has been really appreciative of all of the work that you're doing. So, I appreciate you, had his picture up, so I remembered to say that.

24:08

So, we're also, going to let you, Fionnuala you did another really great demonstration inadvertently with that. So, as you probably saw on Fionnuala's browser, she has program guidance bookmarked, so it's very easy and very quick defined. We highly recommend you make that accessible on your quick access toolbar.

24:25

If you ever have trouble finding things on program guidance, let us know. We need, we try to make that is available to you and is accessible to you as possible.

24:34

So if you are trying to find something and it's not how you would look it up, let us know so that we can figure out, a way to make sure that we are making it available in a way that you would look up. So we're not seeing any other questions. I think everybody has a little bit of spring fever on this webinar today.

24:51

So I hope that, you know, we are going to be able to give you a good amount of time back in your day to kick off your two weeks coming up as Spring Break. I know it's a week for each of you, depending on which schedule you're on. So we will miss you these next two weeks. But we will be appreciating you from afar and making sure you have the information you need in the School Lunch Tray.

25:13

And thank you so much again for all you're doing. We know a lot of you are serving kids over spring break too, and that, that's a huge deal. So thank you for that, as well.

25:22

Thank you to my team, and with that, I think we'll go ahead and sign off.

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For more information, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's Training for School Nutrition Programs webpage, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) in the CSDE's Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

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