




STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**TO:** School Superintendents, Headmasters, Charter School Directors, and Private School Principals administering federal Child Nutrition Programs

**FROM:** John D. Frassinelli, Bureau Chief   
Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education

**DATE:** October 16, 2019

**SUBJECT:** Hiring and Professional Standards for School Child Nutrition Program Personnel

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Final Rule 84 FR 6953: *Hiring Flexibility Under Professional Standards* adds the following three flexibilities to the hiring standards for new school nutrition program directors (i.e., food service directors) of USDA Child Nutrition Programs (CNPs) in small local educational agencies (LEAs). LEAs considering implementing these flexibilities must receive prior approval from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE).

1. LEAs with 2,499 or fewer students may accept relevant food service experience as a substitute for school nutrition program experience when hiring new school nutrition program directors.
2. State agencies may consider volunteer or unpaid work as relevant food service experience for new school nutrition program directors in LEAs with 2,499 or fewer students.
3. LEAs with fewer than 500 students may accept less than the required years of food service experience when an applicant for a new school nutrition program director position has the minimum required education.

The rationale for the flexibilities is to expand the pool of candidates eligible to serve as leaders in smaller school nutrition programs. However, the CSDE cautions LEAs to ensure that school nutrition program directors are able to perform all necessary duties and ensure compliance with federal and state regulations. The requirements and regulations that govern the USDA school meal programs are numerous, complicated, and specific. Failure to ensure continuous compliance will likely result in recovery of federal funds for reimbursement of meals served. If LEAs choose to utilize these flexibilities and hire program directors without school food service experience, it is in the LEA's best interest to ensure that candidates have applicable substitute experience in congregate meal operations, such as:

- large scale food production and ordering;
- menu and meal planning for youth;
- managing and scheduling staff;
- budgeting for staff, equipment, and food;

- accurate forecasting;
- maintaining detailed eligibility determinations; and
- ensuring detailed food and meal production records.

Please note that none of the flexibilities apply to LEAs with student populations greater than 2,499. Specific regulatory requirements remain in place for LEAs with student enrollment greater than 2,499 regarding minimum qualifications for new school nutrition program directors and annual training requirements for school staff working in the USDA CNPs. These regulations have been in effect since July 1, 2015. School nutrition program directors hired on or after that date in such larger LEAs are required to meet the minimum education and experience requirements at the time of hire by the LEA. The regulations also apply to program directors hired under food service management company contracts to operate school meal services in the CNPs.

Fiscal implications for district noncompliance can impact not only the nonprofit food service program, but also the LEA's general fund account. USDA Memo [SP 38-2016](#) indicates that the nonprofit school food service account cannot pay for a school nutrition program director who does not meet the hiring standards.

*“SFAs [LEAs/school food authorities with student populations greater than 2,499] may not use the nonprofit school food service account to pay the salary of a new school nutrition program director (hired on or after July 1, 2015) who does not meet the hiring standards. Using funds to support non-compliance is considered an unallowable cost. In addition, the school food service funds may not be used to pay for required college education. However, if the State agency and SFA set a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) with a reasonable timeline (i.e., by the next administrative review cycle) for completion of the hiring standards, the LEA's general fund account could be used to pay the salary of a new director who is actively pursuing the minimum education and other requirements outlined in the CAP to meet the hiring standards. Otherwise, using the LEA's general fund or finding alternate ways to pay the salary of a director who does not meet the hiring standards would not support the goal of the professional standards regulations.”*

For LEAs with 2,499 students or fewer, the Final Rule allows a state agency to approve a LEA's use of the nonprofit school food service account to pay the salary of a school nutrition program director who does not meet the hiring standards. This is allowable only if the LEA is complying with a state agency-approved plan to ensure that the program director will meet the professional standards requirements.

LEAs considering implementing these flexibilities must receive prior approval from the CSDE. If you have questions about utilizing these flexibilities, your LEA's current compliance, or need help ensuring that a new school nutrition program director position posting complies with the federal and state hiring standards, please contact your CSDE school nutrition consultant listed on page three of this memo.

The resources below provide more details regarding the USDA’s hiring requirements based on the size of the LEA, as well as the annual training requirements for all school CNP personnel.

- [Professional Standards for School Nutrition Professionals](#) (CSDE webpage)
- [USDA Memo SP 38-2016: Questions & Answers \(Q&As\) on the Final Rule “Professional Standards for State and Local School Nutrition Programs Personnel as Required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010”](#) (Note: Includes Connecticut requirements regarding Professional Standards.)
- [CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 16-15: Final Rule: Professional Standards for State and Local School Nutrition Programs Personnel as Required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010](#)
- [CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 31-15: Questions and Answers on the Final Rule](#)

For additional guidance, please contact your CSDE school nutrition consultant listed below.

<b>CSDE Consultants for School Child Nutrition Programs</b>	
<b>County</b>	<b>Consultant</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fairfield County (Includes Region 9)</li> <li>• Litchfield County (Includes Regions 1, 6, 7, 12, and 14)</li> </ul>	<p>Fionnuala Brown  <a href="mailto:fionnuala.brown@ct.gov">fionnuala.brown@ct.gov</a>            860-807-2129</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hartford County (Includes Region 10)</li> <li>• Middlesex County (Includes Regions 4, 13, and 17)</li> </ul>	<p>Teri Dandeneau  <a href="mailto:teri.dandeneau@ct.gov">teri.dandeneau@ct.gov</a>            860-807-2079</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Haven County (Includes Regions 5, 15, and 16)</li> </ul>	<p>Jackie Schipke  <a href="mailto:jackie.schipke@ct.gov">jackie.schipke@ct.gov</a>            860-807-2123</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New London County</li> <li>• Tolland County (Includes Regions 8 and 19)</li> <li>• Windham County (Includes Region 11)</li> </ul>	<p>Susan Alston  <a href="mailto:susan.alston@ct.gov">susan.alston@ct.gov</a>            860-807-2081</p>

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cc: School Business Administrators  
 School Nutrition Program Directors