

Back to School Checklist

This checklist outlines key activities and tools to help sponsors prepare for a successful school year.



Renewal Applications

- Submit your applications for the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program and Afterschool Snack Program in the [Child Nutrition Portal](#) no later than September 15, 2025. Find detailed application instructions on the [How to Apply webpage](#).
 - Afterschool Snack Program applications may be submitted anytime during the school year.

School Meal Eligibility and Household Income Forms

- Complete the first [Direct Certification](#) match in the Child Nutrition Portal prior to the first day of school.
- [Distribute, collect, and process household income applications](#) to determine student eligibility:
 - Sponsors not participating in HSMA: Use the standard free and reduced-price application.
 - HSMA Sponsors with no or some CEP sites: Use the combination form to streamline information collection between all sites.
 - HSMA Sponsors with all CEP sites: Use the combination form or [FEDS form](#) for household income collection. (optional)

Meal Counting & Claiming

- Ensure the Point Of Sale system is set up to claim meals by student eligibility (not required for sites operating CEP).
 - If participating in Healthy School Meals for All: ensure the POS is set up so no students will be charged for a meal. Sites not operating CEP must still count students by eligibility status.
- Establish internal controls with claim [edit check](#) processes to ensure daily meal counts do not exceed the number of students eligible or in attendance.
- Follow unpaid meal charges protocols utilizing the [Unpaid Meal Charges Flyer](#) and [Debt and Donation Guidance](#) resources.
- Review the [meal claiming instructions](#) to ensure you will be prepared to enter claims prior to the deadline.

Civil Rights

- Utilize the [Civil Rights Requirements Self-Check](#) to review and document compliance.

Your Keys to Success:

- Subscribe to the [Dish Newsletter](#) for the latest program updates, reminders and resources
- Visit the [Events and Program Deadlines webpage](#) for additional due dates
- Identify [your point of contact](#) for the upcoming school year. This person will answer program questions and assist with applications and reviews.
- Check the [AR cycle](#) to see if you will receive a review this year.
- Make use of School Nutrition's [training resources](#)
 - Monthly "On The Menu" calls: every 4th Thursday + other webinars
 - In Person trainings
 - Self-paced online training on CDE's Moodle platform.
 - Recorded webinars posted on website

Visit the [School Nutrition website!](#)

Meal Patterns

- Review your menus for compliance with USDA's Final Rule (link to our [Plan Meals webpage](#) or [USDA's Final Rule webpage](#))
 - Cereal, yogurt and flavored milk must now meet added sugar limits
 - The Afterschool Snack Program meal pattern now aligns with the other child nutrition program meal patterns
- Registered Dietitians may complete medical statements for meal modifications
- Additional meal pattern flexibilities implemented in SY24-25 remain in place

Professional Standards

- [Track all completed trainings](#) on a training tracker with key area and learning objective codes.
- Annual procurement training is required for staff who work with NSLP procurement. CDE offers two options, [an On the Menu webinar](#) and a [Moodle course](#).
- All School Nutrition professionals must complete required training hours over the course of the school year.

Resource Management

- Complete the Paid Lunch Equity Tool to ensure the paid meals price meets federal requirements.
 - Waived for sponsors participating in Healthy School Meals for All and/or CEP.
- Complete the Non-program Revenue Tool to ensure pricing for non-program foods meets federal requirements.



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Healthy School Meals for All (HSMA)

- Sponsors are required to implement CDE's operating recommendations to remain eligible for this program. Operating recommendations are provided to districts on a 1:1 basis.
- Sponsors with non-CEP sites are required to implement activities listed in the [Application Policy](#) to increase free/reduced application collection.
- Sponsors participating in HSMA can use the [outreach toolkit](#) to share more information with your school community. This toolkit includes talking points on the importance of families providing household income information.
- Sponsors will opt in or out of the program via the renewal application. Applications must be submitted by September 16.
- **HSMA may change in January pending November election results.** For more information on HSMA and the November election, visit the [webpage](#) and [frequently asked questions document](#). Additionally, a [letter to families template](#) is available to help communicate these potential changes to your school community.

Food Safety

- Contact your local public health agency to [request two food safety inspections](#) for the school year. Best practice is to submit the request prior to the new SY start date, or within the first 2 weeks of program operations.
- Ensure at least 1 person at each kitchen site with on-site meal preparation has completed the [Certified Food Protection Manager](#) certification.

Serving Preschool Students

- [Confirm program eligibility](#) for any preschool students you plan to serve.