

Chapter 28: Professional Standards

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USDA Professional Standard Requirements

USDA has established minimum professional standards requirements for school nutrition professionals who manage and operate the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.

The standards, another key provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA), aim to institute minimum education standards for new State and local school nutrition directors as well as annual training standards for all school nutrition professionals. These new standards will ensure school nutrition personnel have the knowledge, training, and tools they need to plan, prepare, and purchase healthy products to create nutritious, safe, and enjoyable school meals. This final rule will:

- Create minimum hiring standards for new school food authority (SFA) directors based on a school district's size;
- Establish minimum hiring standards for new State directors of school nutrition programs and State directors of distributing agencies; and
- Require minimum annual training for all new and current school nutrition professionals.

A comprehensive Professional Standards Web site provides a database of training options. School nutrition staff can search for training that meets their learning needs in one easy-to-use location: <https://professionalstandards.fns.usda.gov/>.

Training Hours Required for Nutrition Program Employees

All Directors	At least 12 hours of annual continuing education/training. This required continuing education/training is in addition to the food safety training required in the first year of employment.
All Managers	At least 10 hours of annual continuing education/training.
Full Time Staff Works an average of at least 20 hours	At least 6 hours of annual continuing education/training.
Part-Time Staff Works an average of less than 20 hours	Each year, at least 4 hours of annual continuing education/training, regardless of the number of part-time hours worked.

Professional Learning Requirements

Allowable training should focus on the day-to-day management and operation of the school nutrition programs. Training must be job-specific and intended to help employees perform their duties well.

Professional Standards Learning Objective

The Professional Standards Learning Objectives are a resource for school nutrition professionals and trainers. This resource lists training topics in the four Key Areas of Nutrition, Operations, Administration and Communications/Marketing. Each Key Area has several Training Topics and specific learning objectives that will assist those who are planning or taking training. These same categories are used in the on-line database of trainings as well as in the optional USDA Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool.

Key Areas	Training Topics
Nutrition - 1000	Menu Planning (1100) Nutrition Education (1200) General Nutrition (1300)
Operations - 2000	Food Production (2100) Serving Food (2200) Cashier and Point of Service (2300) Purchasing/Procurement (2400) Receiving and Storage (2500) Food Safety and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) (2600)
Administration - 3000	Free and Reduced-Price Meal Benefits (3100) Program Management (3200) Financial Management (3300) Human Resources and Staff Training (3400) Facilities and Equipment Planning (3500)
Communications and Marketing - 4000	Communications and Marketing (4100)

Learning Objectives

Nutrition 1000

Menu Planning - 1100

Employees will be able to effectively and efficiently plan and prepare standardized recipes, cycle menus, and meals, including the use of USDA Foods, to meet all Federal School Nutrition Program requirements, including the proper meal components.

- 1110- Plan menus that meet USDA nutrition requirements for reimbursable meals, including calculating meal components.
- 1120- Plan cycle menus that meet all requirements. Consider cost, equipment, foods available, storage, staffing, student tastes, and promotional events.
- 1130- Utilize local food sources, especially Farm to School, when possible.
- 1140- Write standardized recipes, and use Food Buying Guide.
- 1150- Analyze menus for School Meal Pattern requirements.
- 1160- Plan meals to accommodate students requiring special diets, including food allergies.
- 1170- Plan for effective use of USDA Foods.

Nutrition Education - 1200

Employee will be able to utilize resources to prepare and integrate age/grade appropriate nutrition education curriculum with school nutrition program.

- 1210- Plan age/grade appropriate nutrition education activities using USDA Team Nutrition materials when possible.
- 1220- Integrate nutrition education curriculum with school nutrition program, utilizing the cafeteria as a learning environment (include Team Nutrition resources).
- 1230- Support school gardens as a means of nutrition education

General Nutrition - 1300

Employee will be able to understand the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, USDA's food guidance system concepts and general nutrition principles.

- 1310- Relate the Dietary Guidelines and USDA's food guidance system (such as MyPlate) concepts to the goals of the school nutrition programs.
- 1320- Understand general nutrition concepts that relate to school meals, such as whole grains, sodium, etc.

Operations 2000

Food Production - 2100

Employee will be able to effectively utilize food preparation principles, production records, kitchen equipment, and food crediting to prepare foods from standardized recipes, including those for special diets.

- 2110- Understand and effectively prepare food using a standardized recipe.
- 2120- Complete a food production record and other required paperwork.
- 2130- Develop culinary skills necessary for school meal preparation.
- 2140- Properly use and care for equipment.
- 2150- Understand CN Labeling, product formulation statements and/or appropriate crediting information for School Meal Pattern requirements.

Serving Food - 2200

Employee will be able to correctly and efficiently serve food portions that meet all USDA School Meal Pattern requirements and encourage healthy food selections including those for special diets.

- 2210- Identify/serve portions of food items according to USDA School Meal Pattern requirements and special diet restrictions.
- 2220- Use Offer Versus Serve correctly.
- 2230- Serve food to maintain quality and appearance standards.
- 2240- Manage serving lines for clean and efficient operation.

Cashier and Point of Service - 2300

Employee will be able to efficiently operate and utilize a Point of Service (POS) system, ensuring correct application of reimbursable meal components, Offer Versus Serve, and confidential student eligibility identification in a financially responsible manner.

- 2310- Count reimbursable meals according to meal pattern requirements (including Offer Versus Serve) and eligibility status.
- 2320- Use financial responsibility at POS.
- 2330- Apply proper measures to prevent overt identification of students receiving free or reduced- price meals.

Purchasing - 2400

Employee will be able to effectively and efficiently implement purchasing procedures and practices in order to appropriately and best utilize supplies and USDA Foods to meet menu requirements and comply with all Federal, State, and Local regulations.

- 2410- Develop product specifications to best meet menu requirements.
- 2420- Solicit, receive, and evaluate bids for award in compliance with Federal, State, and Local regulations.
- 2430- Purchase food, supplies, and equipment through vendors, meeting school district specifications in compliance with Federal, State, and Local procurement regulations and availability of USDA Foods.
- 2440- Generate food and supply orders.
- 2450- Identify possible cooperative purchasing groups and geographic preference options.
- 2460- Develop and monitor contract(s) with a food service management company and/or other vendors.

Receiving and Storage - 2500

Employee will be able to ensure proper inventory management including correct delivery and storage of inventory, and that which has been placed on hold or recalled.

- 2510- Develop processes for inventory management.
- 2520- Apply safe and effective inventory receiving and storage procedures.
- 2530- Understand hold and recall procedures.

Food Safety and HACCP Training - 2600

Employee will be able to effectively utilize all food safety program guidelines and health department regulations to ensure optimal food safety.

- 2610- Practice a HACCP-based program.
- 2620- Practice general food safety procedures.
- 2630- Practice Federal, State, and Local food safety regulations and guidance.
- 2640- Promote a culture of food safety behaviors in the school community (includes training on food allergens).

Administration 3000

Free and Reduced-Price Meal Benefits - 3100

Employee will be able to effectively certify, process, and verify free and reduced-price meal eligibility benefits in accordance with Federal and State regulations related to nutrition programs. Understand and apply Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to eliminate the administrative burden of school meal applications and be able to serve meals at no charge to the students.

- 3110- Certify, process, and verify free and reduced-price meal eligibility benefits in compliance with Federal regulations.
- 3120- Understand and practice direct certification procedures practiced by your state.
- 3130- Understand and apply Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

Program Management - 3200

Employee will be able to effectively manage staff and resources; prepare for yearly Administrative Reviews, emergency programs; and utilize Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

- 3210- Manage staff work including scheduling.
- 3220- Oversee SOPs for routine operations.
- 3230- Evaluate and utilize resources to promote a healthy school environment.
- 3240- Develop and implement emergency and disaster plans as needed.
- 3250- Manage water, energy, and waste.
- 3260- Prepare for Administrative Reviews.

Financial Management - 3300

Employee will be able to manage procedures and records for compliance and Resource Management efficiency and accuracy in accordance with all Federal, State, and Local regulations, as well as the Administrative Review.

- 3310- Implement a system of checks and balances to ensure accuracy and integrity of meal counting and claiming, funds collected, and record keeping.
- 3320- Establish and document appropriate accounting procedures for all revenues and expenses, ensuring that all procedures comply with Federal, State, and Local regulations and Administrative Review.
- 3330- Prepare a budget that appropriately reflects financial goals.
- 3340- Analyze financial statements and accounting procedures to make informed financial decisions and ensure alignment with budget and regulations.
- 3350- Recommend prices for meals and other food items to district authorities, maintaining compliance with Federal, State, and Local guidelines.

- 3360- Communicate financial goals, status, and other data to appropriate district and State authorities.

Human Resources and Staff Training - 3400

Employee will be able to implement human resources management practices through maintenance and familiarity with current personnel policies and procedures and support employees through training and retention strategies.

- 3410- Understand and apply human resource management practices.
- 3420- Implement current personnel policies and procedures.
- 3430- Develop employee training plans, including a plan for tracking training.
- 3440- Implement a system for employee retention, promotion, and recognition.
- 3450- Foster employee health, safety, and wellness (includes training on First Aid and CPR).

Facilities and Equipment Planning - 3500

Employee will be able to evaluate school nutrition program equipment and facilities to ensure maximum efficiency and availability of healthy food choices.

- 3510- Evaluate/plan facilities and equipment to meet program goals.
- 3520- Maintain plans for purchasing and maintaining equipment.

Communications and Marketing 4000

Communications and Marketing - 4100

Employee will be able to develop plans that include involvement with school and community members, empower school nutrition leaders, and address excellent customer service.

- 4110- Develop strategic plans and marketing plans that reflect program goals and enhance interaction with stakeholders.
- 4120- Promote the Child Nutrition Program.
- 4130- Empower school nutrition professionals to provide excellent customer service.
- 4140- Develop communications skills.
- 4150- Communicate within the school and to the community through multiple approaches to inform and educate stakeholders.
- 4160- Create an environment that engages students to select and consume healthy foods with minimum waste, including research based techniques.

Professional Standards Tracking

The regulation does not specify the kind of records that must be kept. Records that list the employee name, employer/school, training title, topic/objectives, training source, dates, and total training hours would be appropriate to demonstrate training completion. Records must be maintained and made available to the State agency upon request. SFAs should keep training records for 3 years, plus the current school year.

USDA's Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool 2.0 (<https://pstrainingtracker.fns.usda.gov/>) may be used to document the annual training hours. This free online tool provides great features, such as:

- Allowing manager to set up an employee roster and enter/edit training records for multiple employees all at once;
- Auto-populating school contact information to easily set up profiles;
- Running reports; and
- A database of trainings to auto-populate training information.

The tool provides reminder alerts and email notification of how many training hours have been completed and how many hours remain to be completed to fulfill the annual training requirement. A certificate of completion for the manager and all staff can be saved, emailed, and/or printed once the annual requirement is met. Please contact cnpntab@usda.gov with any technical questions about the tool.

Alternative training tracking tools may be developed by State agencies and/or SFAs to keep track of and print reports of training hours, but must include at a minimum the required fields listed in the USDA Professional Standards Training Tracking Tool 2.0. These fields would include items such as the employee information; training hours completed; and the Key Areas, Training Topics, and Learning Objectives as listed in the Professional Standards Learning Objectives and Topics with Codes.

Hiring Standards for New School Nutrition Program Directors

New directors, those hired on or after July 1, 2015, are subject to the new education requirements below. Existing directors will be grandfathered in their current positions as well as in the Student Enrollment category where they currently are working. School Nutrition Program Directors are the individuals responsible for the operation of school nutrition programs for all schools under the local educational agency (LEA).

All school nutrition program directors, for all local educational agency sizes, must have completed at least eight hours of food safety training within five years prior to their starting date or complete eight hours of food safety training within 30 calendar days of their starting date. At the discretion of the State agency, all school nutrition program directors, regardless of their starting date, may be required to complete eight hours of food safety training every five years.

Minimum Requirements for Directors	Student Enrollment 2,499 or less	Student Enrollment 2,500-9,999	Student Enrollment 10,000 or more
Minimum Education Standards See the final rule for additional preferred educational standards for new directors	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas;* OR Bachelor's degree in any academic major, and State-recognized certificate for school nutrition directors; OR Bachelor's degree in any academic major, and at least 1 year of relevant school nutrition programs experience; OR Associate's degree or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas,* and at least 1 year of relevant school nutrition programs experience; OR High school diploma (or GED) and at least 3 years of relevant experience in school nutrition programs. (For an LEA with less than 500 students, the State agency may approve a candidate who meets the educational standards but has less than the required 3 years experience.)	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas;* OR Bachelor's degree in any academic major, and State-recognized certificate for school nutrition directors; OR Bachelor's degree in any academic major and at least 2 years of relevant school nutrition programs experience; OR Associate's degree or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas,* and at least 2 years of relevant school nutrition programs experience.	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas;* OR Bachelor's degree in any academic major, and State-recognized certificate for school nutrition directors; OR Bachelor's degree in any academic major and at least 5 years experience in management of school nutrition programs. *Specific majors/areas of concentration: food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field.

Questions and Answers

Q1: Who is considered to be program staff with the need to complete annual training?

A1: The professional standards vary by three job categories: directors, managers, and staff. Program staff would generally include individuals such as cooks, cashiers, and others who are involved in the preparation and service of school meals; individuals who are involved in other program operations, such as eligibility determinations, and meal counting and claiming; and support staff who may have an impact on the safety of school meals. However, a person who provides support to, but is not specifically involved in, the operation of the school nutrition program, such as the cleaning custodian, is not required to meet the training standards (even if they are paid using nonprofit food service account funds). The program director or manager must examine the job duties of program staff to determine what job specific training they need to perform their jobs effectively and in compliance with program regulations.

Q2: Does back-to-school training on general topics such as security procedures and building operations count toward the annual training standards?

A2: No. Only training that fosters proper administration and operation of the school nutrition program counts toward the training standards. To identify appropriate training topics for various school nutrition program personnel, visit https://fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/ps_learningobjectives.pdf

Q3: Does annual civil rights training provided by the school district count towards the annual training standards?

A3: Yes. Civil rights training may contribute to proper administration of the Program if it covers topics that are relevant for school nutrition program employees, such as the civil rights provision in §210.23(b) of the NSLP regulations, the FNS Instruction 783-2, meal substitutions for students with disabilities that restrict their diets, and issues that may limit equal access to school meals.

Q4: May excess training hours be applied over multiple school years?

A4: Yes. As stated in regulation §210.30(e), OHN allows excess annual training hours to be applied to the school year directly preceding or directly following the date of the training. This is intended to help provide flexibility while ensuring that SFA employees receive a reasonable amount of training each school year. Documentation to show completion of training must be available to the State agency for review.

Q5: Does attendance at a motivational speaker lecture, or participation in a session to discuss program issues or to gather program information from the district count toward the training standards?

A5: A presentation by a motivational speaker regarding a topic unrelated to proper administration and operation of the school nutrition programs does not count toward the training standards. Meetings or sessions that fit under the learning objectives and training topics listed in the SP 05-2020 Page 13 professional standards website could count toward the training standards. Time spent on advocacy type discussions does not count as annual training.