



ILLINOIS
STATE BOARD OF
EDUCATION

THE OUTLOOK

A Monthly Newsletter for School Nutrition Programs

TRAININGS & WEBINARS IN THE NEW YEAR

Sign Up for ISBE SNP Updates

Join Illinois State Board of Education Nutrition Department staff for updates on School Nutrition Programs!

[Registration is under way for the spring semester webinars; just click this link to sign up for them all.](#)

The ISBE SNP Updates are scheduled for the first Wednesdays in February, March, April, and May, from 2-3 p.m.

We'll cover important reminders and hot topics. Attendees can submit questions during the presentation for a question-and-answer session at the conclusion of the webinar.

Recordings of the School Year 2024-25 ISBE SNP Updates are available on the [SNP Training and Professional Standards webpage](#).

The November ISBE SNP Update included a refresher on preparing for an Administrative Review.

The list of [School Food Authorities Selected for School Year 2024-25 Administrative Review](#) is available on the [Monitoring and Review Information webpage](#). Here you can also find a ["Preparing for an Administrative Review" resource guide](#) and other resources, including a Q&A document, Administrative Review checklists, and recorded trainings. You can also review Section L of the [School Nutrition Programs Administrative Handbook](#) for guidance on reviews.

Food Handler and Allergy Trainings

[Registration is open for two ABCs of School Nutrition trainings](#) in the new year.

"Serve It Safely Food Handler Training" is set for 2-4:30 p.m. Jan. 30. This training is approved by the Illinois Department of Public Health.

"Food Allergies in School Nutrition" is scheduled for 2:30-4:30 p.m. Feb. 11.

The ISBE Nutrition Department partners with the University of Illinois Extension to provide resources and training to support school nutrition programs in Illinois. This initiative is called the ABCs of School Nutrition.

NEWS BITES

USDA FOODS SURVEY

Please complete the ISBE Nutrition Department's **School Year 2026 USDA Foods Available List Survey** by Jan. 8 to provide input on the USDA Foods offered next school year. A link to the survey is on [ISBE's Food Distribution webpage](#), under the "ICS Resources" section. The completed survey should be emailed to fdp@isbe.net.

SAVE THE DATES!

The **Illinois State Board of Education School Wellness Conference** is set for April 8-9 at the Bloomington-Normal Marriott Hotel & Conference Center. Pre-conference workshops are scheduled for April 7. The conference will feature inspirational keynote speakers, evening entertainment, and more! The theme is "Thriving Together: Comprehensive School Wellness Solutions." [Watch for details online by clicking here.](#)

USDA MEMO

On Nov. 1, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service issued a [memo regarding fees for electronic payment services in the School Nutrition Programs](#). This does not take effect until School Year 2027-28. This memorandum clarifies policy related to fees associated with electronic payments in the school meal programs and ensures students who are determined eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits receive the benefits they qualify for without having to pay additional fees. The memo states families with students eligible for free or reduced price meals must not be charged any fees along with the cost of a meal, including fees for using electronic payment services.

Verification Summary Report Deadline Dec. 15

On Nov. 1, Steps 2-5 of the VSR opened in WINS. (View the [VSR Steps 2-5 training](#).) Nov. 15 marked the completion of the Verification process. You then have until Dec. 15 to submit your VSR.

The VSR must be submitted in WINS to avoid claim withholding.

If you have not started Verification or need assistance, please start by watching the "Verification Process for School Year 2024-25" training, which is available on the [SNP Training and Professional Standards webpage](#).

Sponsors should also be familiar with the [SNP Administrative Handbook](#) (Section I is on Verification).

All School Nutrition Program sponsors participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) who receive and approve Household Eligibility Applications between July 1 to Oct. 1, 2024, must conduct Verification. (Sponsors that are district-wide Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) do not need to complete the Verification process or the VSR.)

USDA Seeks Applicants for Farm to School Grants

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is seeking applications for the **2025 Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grants**.



meals, it boosts nutrition, strengthens supply chains, and supports farmers and producers across America.

Applications are due by Jan. 10. Get started by learning more at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/f2s/grant>.

K-12 schools nationwide serve meals to about 30 million children every school day. These meals provide critical nutrition to children and the foundation for our nation to have a healthier future. And when local foods are incorporated into school

Earlier this year, USDA awarded the 2024 Farm to School Grants, a record-breaking \$14.3 million for 154 projects in 43 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and Puerto Rico. These investments will help 1.9 million children eat more tasty, nutritious foods in school, while supporting farmers and producers in their local and regional communities.

Know the Requirements for School Districts

[Public Act 096-0734](#) (amends Public Act 095-0155), amends Section 20 of the Childhood Hunger Relief Act (105 ILCS 126/20). This amendment requires a school district to implement a summer breakfast and/or lunch program for the duration of the summer school program in all schools where 50 percent or more of the student population is eligible for free or reduced-price meals AND that have a summer school program.

This amendment applies to all schools that meet the above criteria, including those schools not currently participating in any federal Child Nutrition Program. There is an opt-out clause in the legislation, but it must be completed by Jan. 15.

[The Public Act](#) along with [Question and Answers](#) are accessible [on the ISBE website](#). For more information about Summer Meals, visit ISBE's [Summer Food Service Program](#) and [Seamless Summer Option](#) webpages.

Important Dates to Remember

Jan. 15: Deadline to submit written Opt-Out Request to your regional superintendent of schools.

Feb. 15: Deadline to develop and keep on file the district plan to conduct a summer lunch and/or breakfast program for each school where at least 50 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals AND that have a summer school program.



Sign up for the Summer Food Service Program training if participating in the SFSP. For more information on SFSP, visit <https://www.isbe.net/Pages/Summer-Food-Service-Program.aspx>.

Prior to March 1: Regional superintendent of schools must convene a public hearing to hear testimony from the school district and interested community members.

March 1: Deadline for regional superintendent to:

- Inform the school district, in writing, of their decision, along with the reasons why the exemption was granted or denied.
- Provide a listing to the Nutrition Department of all districts that applied to opt-out, along with the affected schools, whether the exemption was granted or denied, and the reasons for the action.

April 1: Deadline for the Illinois State Superintendent of Education to hear appeals on the decisions of regional superintendents of schools.

Public Act 096-0734 requires all school districts in Illinois planning to operate an academic summer school or enrichment program in a building with 50 percent or more of the students eligible for free or reduced-price meals must operate a summer feeding program for at least the duration of the program.



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Announcements, Events, & Deadlines

- **Dec. 3** – Illinois Farm to School Network's Next Gen Bootcamp
- **Dec. 9** – National Pasta Day,
Recipe Highlight: Chicken Alfredo With a Twist
- **Dec. 10** – Submit November claims in WINS
- **Dec. 15** – Verification Summary Report deadline
- **Dec. 25** – Christmas Day (ISBE offices closed)
- **January** – National Oatmeal Month,
Recipe Highlight: Oatmeal Muffin Squares
- **Jan. 1** – New Year's Day (ISBE offices closed)
- **Jan. 10** – 2025 Farm to School Grant application deadline
- **Jan. 10** – Submit December claims in WINS
- **Jan. 12-18** – National Pizza Week,
Recipe Highlight: Fun Fruit Breakfast Pizza
- **Jan. 20** – Martin Luther King Jr. Day (ISBE offices closed)
- **Jan. 30** – Serve It Safely Food Handler Training



Please note this is not a complete list of Nutrition Department events, meetings, and deadlines. Visit us online at www.isbe.net/nutrition.

Nondiscrimination Statement

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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, audiotope, 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/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.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

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