



THE OUTLOOK

A Monthly Newsletter for School Nutrition Programs

ACE YOUR ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW



ISBE Nutrition Department staff will present **School Nutrition Programs Administrative Review Workshops** at six locations across the state in October. Registration is under way; [click here to register](#) today! Space is limited for the in-person training, which is designed to help you ace your review.

On-site sign-in is 8-8:30 a.m. with the workshops scheduled 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Lunch will be provided. Here are the dates and locations available:

- **Oct. 2 in Ina** (Rend Lake College, 468 North Gray Pkwy., Ina, IL 62846)
- **Oct. 7 in Rantoul** (Rantoul City Schools Central Office, Boardroom, 1 Aviation Center Drive, Rantoul, IL 61866)
- **Oct. 14 in Springfield** (IEA Professional Development Center, 3440 Liberty Drive, Springfield, IL 62704)
- **Oct. 14 in Oglesby** (Illinois Valley Community College, 815 N. Orlando Road, Oglesby, IL 61348)

- **Oct. 28 in Olympia Fields** (Rich Township High School District 227, STEM Campus, 3600 203rd St., Olympia Fields, IL 60461)
- **Oct. 30 in Wheeling** (CCSD 21 Community Service Center and Administrative Office, Boardroom A308, 959 W. Dundee Road, Wheeling, IL 60090)

All sponsors are encouraged to join us for an interactive training, where you will learn how to organize the required compliance information and hear a summary of each area under review to ensure program requirements are met. Please note that each attendee must register individually with a unique email.

The Administrative Review is a comprehensive evaluation of School Nutrition Programs operated by school food authorities (SFAs). State agencies are required to review each SFA a minimum of once every five years.

A list of SFAs tentatively selected for SY 2025-26 Administrative Review is available on the ISBE [Monitoring and Review Information webpage](#).

NEWS BITES

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

ISBE Nutrition Department staff recently presented a webinar on operating the **Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)** for SY 2025-26. A recording and a PDF of the slides are available for review on the [CEP webpage](#).

ILSNA CONFERENCE

The Illinois School Nutrition Association's **2025 Annual Conference** is set for Oct. 16-17 at the Tinley Park Convention Center. Visit the [ILSNA website](#) for more information.

ON-DEMAND TRAINING

Check out the [SNP Training and Professional Standards webpage](#) for the latest ISBE On-Demand Trainings & Resources, which include a newly recorded training on "**Food Safety & Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP)**."

ISBE SNP UPDATE

Join ISBE Nutrition Department staff on Oct. 1 for the next ISBE School Nutrition Programs Update webinar. [Registration is under way online](#) for the webinar series. We cover important reminders, upcoming events, and hot topics.

FARM TO SCHOOL

Plan something special for the **Midwest Great Apple Crunch** on Oct. 9. The Great Apple Crunch is an annual celebration of fresh, local apples on the second Thursday of October, during National Farm to School Month. Visit the [Illinois Farm to School Network](#) to register and to find materials, activities, and more!



PROCUREMENT



CORNER

DID YOU KNOW? Each School Food Authority (SFA) is required to develop and implement a [written code of conduct](#) policy, also referred to as code of ethics, that covers conflicts of interest and governs the actions of its employees engaged in the selection, award, and administration of contracts. **Ethics in public procurement** is essential when conducting purchasing for government and public bodies and must be based on principles of honesty, fairness, transparency, and accountability. Key ethical practices include fostering open and competitive bidding, ensuring all suppliers are treated equally, preventing conflicts of interest, and upholding legal and contractual compliance. Upholding ethical standards builds public trust that taxpayer money is used responsibly and effectively. Improper conduct can also result in an administrative, civil, or even criminal penalty. Add reviewing code of conduct policy to your to-do list this week.

Professional Standards Trainings and Tracker Tool

The newly re-named and modernized [Professional Standards Trainings and Tracker Tool \(PSTTT\)](#) now has guest access! This enhancement will retire the Professional Standards Training Database, which previously allowed school nutrition professionals to only search and access trainings.

Registered users can now find links to trainings and easily log the training hours once completed, all within one location — the modernized PSTTT. The new guest access feature will allow the same capabilities that the Professional Standards Training Database had with a new look.

Both registered and guest users will be able to access Professional Standards trainings from the PSTTT. Users may search for trainings and

view details such as title, length, format, provider, and cost. Links to the trainings will allow users to navigate to the website where the training is hosted.

The PSTTT is designed to assist school nutrition professionals in searching for relevant training and keeping track of their annually required training hours. For more information on Professional Standards, visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/professional-standards>.

Check out Team Nutrition's [Professional Standards Resources site](#), which include links to the PSTTT and recorded webinars on how to use the PSTTT. Email cnptab@usda.gov for assistance using the PSTTT.

GENERAL PROCUREMENT

Waiver Available for Buy American

The Buy American provision requires School Food Authorities participating in the National School Lunch Program to purchase, to the maximum extent practicable, domestic commodities or products. As of July 1, 2025, non-domestic food purchases must not exceed 10 percent of total annual commercial food costs that an SFA purchases per school year. SFAs that can demonstrate they cannot meet this threshold can apply for a waiver at any time during SY 2025-26.

In the [Buy American Accommodation Process for School Year 2025-26 memorandum](#), which makes the waiver available, the U.S. Department of Agriculture acknowledges concerns about certain products which are integral to school meals menus and the program's nutrition standards that may be difficult to procure domestically.

Steps to apply for the waiver

- Log into WINS.



- Click the "Waivers" link under the "Sponsor Tasks" tab on your main dashboard.
- Press the blue "Apply New Waiver" button.
- Select "SNP Waiver: Buy American Accommodation SY 2025-2026."
- Complete the form, which includes describing the anticipated timeline to make modifications to meet the Buy American requirements, the date range for the requested waiver, the categories of food affected, and the reasons for the accommodation.
- Click the green "Submit" button.

ISBE Nutrition Department staff will review submitted waivers and approvals will be displayed in WINS.

For more information on the Buy American provision, please visit the ISBE Nutrition Department's [General Procurement for All Program webpage](#). Resources include the [USDA Buy American Fact Sheet](#), [Sample Buy American Procurement Clauses](#), and more.

USDA TEAM NUTRITION

Watch New School Menu Planning Trainings

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Team Nutrition added seven short trainings to [The Road to Successful Menu Planning for School Meals](#) training series.

These on-demand webinars help schools plan and implement menus that meet school nutrition standards and meal pattern requirements.

Menu Planning

- [Menu Planning for the National School Lunch Program Afterschool Snack Service](#)
- [Nuts and Seeds Flexibilities in School Meals](#)
- [School Breakfast Menu Flexibilities: Grains and Meats](#)

- [Meat Alternates and Substituting Vegetables for Fruit](#)

- [School Lunch Menu Flexibilities: Beans, Peas, and Lentils](#)

Reducing Added Sugars

- [Reducing Added Sugars at Breakfast: Menu Planning Tips](#)
- [Reducing Added Sugars in Recipes](#)
- [Using Nutrient Analysis Software for Added Sugars](#)

Each training can count toward USDA Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs – Key Area 1000: Nutrition and Training Topic 1100: Menu Planning. They are available now in the [Institute of Child Nutrition's iLearn portal](#) and [USDA's](#)

Professional Standards Trainings and Tracker Tool.

Download New and Revised Resources for School Breakfast:

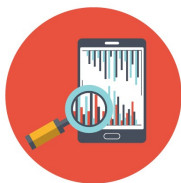
- [Today's Breakfast Poster](#) (New): School nutrition professionals can use this poster to display daily breakfast menu options and remind students to eat a variety of foods.
- [MyPlate Guide to School Breakfast for Families](#) (Revised): This infographic highlights healthy foods that are part of a balanced school breakfast and shows parents and caregivers how they can help their child eat a healthy school breakfast.

It is Time for Verification

Thanks to everyone who joined us for our Verification workshops in September. If you could not make it, a recorded training will be available on the [Verification and the VSR section of the website](#), where you will also find a PDF

of the slides and other Verification forms and resources. An overview of Verification was also included in the September ISBE School Nutrition Programs Update, which is posted under ISBE On-Demand Trainings & Resources on the [SNP Training and Professional Standards webpage](#).

All School Nutrition Program sponsors participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School



Breakfast Program (SBP) who receive and approve Household Eligibility Applications between July 1 to Oct. 1, 2025, must conduct Verification for SY 2025-26. (Sponsors that are district-

wide Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) do not need to complete the Verification process or the VSR.)

We also strongly encourage SFAs to review the [School Nutrition Programs Administrative Handbook](#) section on Verification. An [FAQs document](#) is available on our website to assist schools with the Verification process and the VSR. There are also [Error Prone Instructions](#) and other resources.

Verification Summary Report Data Collection Form: Step 1

By answering the following questions, you will be collecting the data that is required for Step 1, Questions 1-5.

Data collection: Answer the following questions as of Oct. 1 using districtwide data.

Step 1 Application Counts: Section for reporting [paper/electronic applications only](#). Do not include student count from each application.

Prior to reporting Household Eligibility Application(s) count, search for students listed on all application(s) in the Direct Certification system and remove any applications from this count that were found to be directly certified. Report only applications for household with student(s) that could not be directly certified.

Step 1: Application Count

Question 1:

How many applications were approved based on one of the following in Sections 1 or 2 of HEA:

Applications that household(s) provided a SNAP or TANF case number application(s)

Application(s) for approved for foster child application(s)

Total applications application(s)

Enter application total on Step 1, Question 1

Question 2:

Applications approved for FREE meal benefits based on income data (Section 3) application(s)

Enter application total on Step 1, Question 2

Applications approved for REDUCED meal benefits based on income data (Section 3) application(s)

Question 4: Will auto calculate total number of applications listed on Questions 1-3

Question 5: Enter the number of error prone applications received application(s)

The [Verification Summary Report Data Collection Form: Step 1](#) is an optional form available to help sponsors get their numbers set before entering them in WINS.

The Verification Timeline

ASAP: Watch the “SY 2025-26 Verification and VSR” training and read the [Verification section](#) of the School Nutrition Programs Administrative Handbook.

Continue accepting Household Eligibility Applications (HEAs) and try to directly certify students. If you have not started already, we recommend checking for and identifying error-prone applications.

July 1 to Oct. 1: Prior to and on Oct. 1, districts/sponsors must attempt to direct certify as many students as possible that are currently on approved applications. Use of the [Electronic Direct Certification](#) system is done prior to the Oct. 1 application count. Applications with students who are directly certified will no longer need to be included in the Oct. 1 count. The reduction of total applications will reduce the number of applications that must be verified.

Oct. 1: This marks the beginning of the annual Verification process. The Verification Summary Report (VSR) Step 1 opens in WINS. The link to access the report can be found on the sponsor dashboard under the “Reports” section.

Nov. 1: Steps 2-5 of the VSR open in WINS. You may begin entering completed Verification results and data in the VSR.

Nov. 17: Marks the completion of the Verification process. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that processed HEAs to provide free or reduced-price meal benefits to students must have the Verification process completed by Nov. 17 since the traditional deadline falls on Saturday, Nov. 15. Sponsors should be finished with correspondence with households selected for Verification.

Dec. 15: The deadline to submit the Verification Summary Report (VSR) is Dec. 15. The VSR must be submitted in WINS to avoid claim withholding.



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Announcements, Events, & Deadlines

- Oct. 1 – [Verification](#) process begins with application count
- Oct. 1 – [ISBE SNP Update Webinar](#)
- Oct. 2 – [SNP Administrative Review Workshop](#) in Ina
- Oct. 7 – [SNP Administrative Review Workshop](#) in Rantoul
- Oct. 7 – [Food Allergies in School Nutrition](#)
- Oct. 9 – [Midwest Great Apple Crunch](#)
- Oct. 13 – Indigenous Peoples' Day (ISBE offices closed)
- Oct. 13-17 – [National School Lunch Week](#)
- Oct. 14 – [SNP Administrative Review Workshop](#) in Springfield
- Oct. 14 – [SNP Administrative Review Workshop](#) in Oglesby
- Oct. 17 – [Illinois Agriculture in the Classroom Book Grant and Project Grant deadlines](#)
- Oct. 28 – [SNP Administrative Review Workshop](#) in Olympia Fields
- Oct. 30 – [SNP Administrative Review Workshop](#) in Wheeling

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

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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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