



Professional Standards for School Nutrition Program Professionals

Summary of Updates Effective May 2019

In the final rule, *Professional Standards for State and Local School Nutrition Programs Personnel as Required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) of 2010*, USDA established minimum professional standards requirements for school nutrition professionals who manage and operate the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. The standards set the minimum education standards for new State and local school nutrition directors as well as annual training standards for all school nutrition professionals. These standards ensure school nutrition professionals have the knowledge, training, and tools they need to plan, prepare, and purchase healthy food to create nutritious, safe, and enjoyable school meals. The additional final rule, *Hiring Flexibility under Professional Standards*, establishes flexibilities for hiring standards under the Professional Standards regulations.

These final rules:

- 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;
- Add 4 flexibilities to the hiring standards for new school nutrition program directors in small local educational agencies (LEAs) and new State directors of school nutrition programs; and
- Require minimum annual training for all new and current school nutrition professionals.

USDA Professional Standards Training Database (<https://professionalstandards.fns.usda.gov>) has free to low-cost trainings available and is updated regularly. You can search the database by key areas, topics, type of training, and more.

USDA Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool (PSTTT) (<https://pstrainingtracker.fns.usda.gov>) is an optional, free, record-keeping web-based tool that can be used to track required training hours.

Training Standards for School Nutrition Program Professionals (All LEA Sizes)

Job Category	Annual Training Requirements ¹
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.
All Other Staff (Work at least 20 hours or more per week)	At least 6 hours of annual continuing education/training.
Part-Time Staff (Work <20 hours per week)	At least 4 hours of annual continuing education/training, regardless of the number of part-time hours worked.

¹ Annual training requirements apply to the 12 months between July 1 and June 30.

NOTE: If hired January 1 or later, an employee must only complete half of the required training hours.

Training Requirements for State Agency Directors

State Director of School Nutrition Programs	State Director of Distributing Agencies
Each year, at least 15 hours of annual continuing education/training.	Each year, at least 15 hours of annual continuing education/training.
Must PROVIDE, or ensure that State agency staff receives, annual continuing education/training.	Must PROVIDE, or ensure that State food distribution staff receives, annual continuing education/training. ¹
Must also PROVIDE a minimum of 18 hours of training to SFAs each year. ¹	

¹ Training is an approved use of State Administrative Expenses (SAE) funds and a variety of training formats are allowed. States may use contractors or partner with other organizations (e.g., School Nutrition Association, Institute of Child Nutrition) to provide training.

Hiring Standards for New School Nutrition Program Directors

New directors — those hired on or after July 1, 2015 — are subject to the education requirements below. School Nutrition Program Directors are the individuals responsible for the operation of school nutrition programs for all schools under the local educational agency (LEA).

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	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas;¹ 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 food service experience; OR Associate's degree or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas,¹ and at least 1 year of relevant food service experience; OR High school diploma (or GED) and 3 years of relevant food service experience.^{2,3}	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas;¹ 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,¹ and at least 2 years of relevant school nutrition programs experience.	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas;¹ 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.
Minimum Prior Training Standards	At least 8 hours of food safety training is required either not more than 5 years prior to their starting date or completed within 30 calendar days of employee's starting date.		

¹ Related majors include food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field. Consult your State agency for more information about equivalent educational experience.

² For LEAs with fewer than 500 students, and at the State agency's discretion, the SFA can be approved to hire a school nutrition program director who has less than the required years of food service experience, provided the applicant has the minimum education specified in the hiring standards for LEAs with 2,499 students or fewer.

³ At the discretion of the State agency, and on an individual basis, the SFA can hire a new director with documented volunteer or unpaid relevant food service experience.

Hiring Standards for New State Directors

	State Director of School Nutrition Programs	State Director of Distributing Agencies
Education	Bachelor's degree in a related field;¹ OR Master's or doctorate degree in one of the specified fields¹ regardless as to field of the bachelor's degree.	Bachelor's degree with any major.
Knowledge & Experience	Extensive relevant knowledge and experience in areas such as institutional food service operations, management, business, and/or nutrition education.	
Skills & Abilities	Additional abilities and skills needed to lead, manage, and supervise people to support the mission of school nutrition programs.	

¹ Related majors include food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field. State agencies with questions should contact the appropriate FNS Regional Office.



Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) Alabama Professional CNP Director Certification Requirements

Effective August 15, 2023, CNP Directors in school systems with a student enrollment of 2,500 and above must have a valid Alabama Professional Child Nutrition Program Director Certificate issued by the Educator Certification Section of the ALSDE. Smaller school systems with an enrollment of 2,499 or less are strongly encouraged to hire certified CNP Directors but may request an exception for continued employment in CNP.

NOTE: To obtain CNP Director Certification the candidate must meet all requirements listed below the selected option.

Option 1: Bachelor's Degree in Field and Relevant Experience

- ☐ At least an earned bachelor's degree from an accredited institution with an academic major in food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, food science, community nutrition and marketing, hospitality management, or a related field. At least four of the courses must be in food and nutrition.
- ☐ A minimum of 1400 clock hours of compensated food service management experience, or an acceptable alternative to be approved by the State Superintendent of Education, to include but not limited to, supervisory and/or administrative experience attained within the five years immediately preceding the date of application.

Option 2: Bachelor's Degree, Specified Coursework and Relevant Experience

- ☐ An earned bachelor's degree earned from an accredited institution in any major.
- ☐ Specific coursework within three years from the date of employment:
 - Nine semester hours in food and nutrition,
 - Three semester hours in quantity food production,
 - Three semester hours in quantity purchasing,
 - Three semester hours in personnel management, and
 - Three semester hours in accounting.
- ☐ Verified minimum of 1400 clock hours of compensated food service experience.

Option 3: Bachelor's Degree and School Nutrition Specialist (SNS) Credential

- ☐ An earned bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in any major.
- ☐ The School Nutrition Specialist (SNS) Credential from the School Nutrition Association (SNA).

NOTE: See SNS requirements on the SNA website. [SNS-Credentialing-Exam-Handbook.pdf \(schoolnutrition.org\)](https://www.schoolnutrition.org/sns-credentialing-exam-handbook.pdf)

Option 4: Bachelor's Degree and Relevant Experience

- ☐ An earned bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in any major.
- ☐ A minimum of 5 years CNP experience at the level of a school food service manager or higher.

Option 5: Bachelor's Degree and a CNP Director Certificate from Another State

- ☐ An earned bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in any major.
- ☐ A CNP Director Certificate from another state.



Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) Alabama Professional CNP Director Certification Requirements

Certification Exception for CNP Directors in Small School Systems (enrollment of 2,499 or less)

Within three years from the CNP director's date of hire, smaller school systems with an enrollment of 2,499 or less may request an exception for continued employment of an individual who does not hold at least an earned bachelor's degree from an accredited institution. If the CNP director does not meet one of the above certification options, the individual must meet all the following criteria within three years of the date of hire for continued employment as the Child Nutrition Program Director:

- ☐ A high school diploma (or GED).
- ☐ At least three years of school food service management experience.
- ☐ State-approved training for new Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Directors.
- ☐ A Level 4 Certificate from the School Nutrition Association (SNA).

NOTE: See Level 4 Certificate requirements on the SNA website. [Certificate-program-guide.pdf \(schoolnutrition.org\)](https://www.schoolnutrition.org/certificate-program-guide.pdf)

Note: Persons not meeting the Alabama Temporary Exception for Hiring Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Director's standards cannot continue to be paid out of CNP funds (*Code of Alabama*, 1975, 290-080-030-.05).

The LEA may request an exception from the ALSDE State Director of Child Nutrition Programs at cnpslp@alsde.edu.