

USDA Professional Standards Requirements for School Nutrition Program Operators with State-Specific Requirements for North Carolina

(Adapted from the USDA Professional Standards Summary, revised August 2021)

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*, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) established minimum professional standards requirements for school nutrition (SN) 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 SN program directors as well as annual training standards for all SN professionals. These standards ensure SN 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. Additional state-specific requirements have been incorporated into this document.

These final rules:

- Create minimum hiring standards for new State and local SN program directors based on a school district's size;
- Establish minimum hiring standards for new State directors of SN programs and State directors of distributing agencies;
- Add four (4) flexibilities to the hiring standards for new SN program directors in small local educational agencies (LEAs) and new State directors of SN programs; and
- Require minimum annual training for all new and current SN professionals.

Job Category Descriptions

- SN program director - the local individual directly responsible for the management of the day-to-day operations of the SN programs for all participating schools under the jurisdiction of the School Food Authority (SFA); the individual plans, administers, implements, monitors, and evaluates all SFA-wide aspects of SN programs
- SN program manager - those individuals directly responsible for the day-to-day operations of the SN programs for a participating school(s)
- SN program staff - local individuals without managerial responsibilities who are involved in routine operations of the SN programs for a participating school(s); may include, for example, those individuals who prepare and serve meals, process transactions at point of service, and review the free/reduced price applications.

These definitions apply whether or not an SFA is operated by a food service management company. If a new employee will work in more than one position, only the higher-level position requirements apply.

Training Standards for SN Program Professionals

Job Category	Annual Training Requirements ¹
All Directors, Assistant Directors, and Supervisors	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 Full-Time Staff (Work at least 20 hours or more per week)	At least 6 hours of annual continuing education/training.
Part-Time and Temporary Staff (Work less than 20 hours per week)	At least 4 hours of annual continuing education/training, regardless of the number of part-time hours worked. In North Carolina, this includes temporary staff.
Volunteers (if directly involved in SN Program operations, at discretion of SN Program Director)	Individuals volunteering with School Nutrition Programs in North Carolina should receive training. Training topics may vary but should be specific to job duties. Health and food safety training is required for all volunteers involved in food handling (when applicable).

¹ Annual training requirements apply to the 12 months between July 1 and June 30. If hired January 1 or later, an employee must only complete half of the required training hours. North Carolina allows hours completed during the summer to count towards either year's annual requirements (prior year or next year), but not for both years. Refer to North Carolina-specific Professional Standards Q&As for additional detail.

Documentation of training is required. Both the USDA and the School Nutrition Association (SNA) offer tracking tools which may be used to document required continuing education for SN program professionals, or the SFA may develop its own tracking tool or tracking method. Documentation must include the following information:

- employee name;
- employer/school;
- training title;
- date of training;
- topic/objectives;
- source of continuing education; and
- total contact hours.

In North Carolina, we strongly recommend including employee job category (Director, Manager, etc.) for each employee and the learning code for each training in your tracking tool.

Hiring Standards for New SN Program Directors

SN program directors hired on or after July 1, 2015, are subject to the education requirements below. SN program directors are the individuals responsible for the operation of school nutrition programs for all schools within the SFA. Regardless of its size, an SFA typically only has one SN program director. In North Carolina, if any of these standards are not met upon hire (or

within 30 days of hire for the certification described below), the SN program director **cannot** be paid with federal SN program funds until all standards are met.

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 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	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience, with academic major in specific areas; ¹ 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 at least 5 years experience in management of school nutrition programs.

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

² *For SFAs with fewer than 500 students, the SFA may be approved to hire an SN program director at the State agency's discretion 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. North Carolina will review the need to utilize this flexibility on a case-by-case basis.*

Minimum Prior Training Standards: Across all enrollment levels, at least 8 hours of food safety training is required either no more than five (5) years prior to their starting date or completed within 30 calendar days of employee's starting date. *In North Carolina, SN program directors must obtain a Certified Food Protection Manager (CFPM) certification by passing an American National Standards Institute (ANSI)-approved exam within 30 days of hire to the director position or hold a current certification upon hire. North Carolina SN program directors are also required to maintain CFPM status throughout the duration of their position as SN program director. The CFPM certification is valid for a five (5) year period from the date of issue.*

The Administrative Review requires documentation of this food safety certification for the director.

Resources and Tracking Tools

USDA Professional Standards (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/professional-standards>) is an important page to begin learning about federal guidance on Professional Standards for SN Program operators.

NCDPI Office of School Nutrition – Professional Standards (<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/district-operations/school-nutrition/continuing-education-professional-development#ProfessionalStandardsforSchoolNutritionProfessionals-3083>) is a helpful place for additional guidance and resources from the North Carolina State agency.

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.