

# USDA Professional Standards FAQs



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## FINAL RULE

- **Why did USDA develop Professional Standards for school nutrition personnel?**

USDA developed professional standards for a number of reasons, including:

- Training requirements will help build skills
- To help school nutrition professionals stay current with complex school nutrition programs
- To enhance the image of school nutrition employees
- Food handling training for school nutrition staff is crucial for the health of our students

- **What is the USDA Professional Standards Final Rule?**

The final rule establishes minimum professional standards for school nutrition personnel who manage and operate the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. The final rule covers the following areas:

- Hiring standards for state and local school nutrition program directors
- Required annual continuing education/ training for all personnel in school nutrition programs

- **When does the Professional Standards Final Rule go in to effect?**

The Final Rule was released on March 2, 2015 and goes into effect on July 1, 2015.

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

- **How many hours of continuing education/training do I need each year?**

Continuing education/ training requirements for all districts sizes are the same and to facilitate implementation, the rule phases in the training hour requirements for directors, managers, and staff.

	SY 2015-16	SY 2016-17
Directors	8 hours	12 hours
Managers	6 hours	10 hours
Staff (more than 20 hrs/wk)	4 hours	6 hours
Part Time Staff (less than 20 hrs/wk)	4 hours	4 hours

Training received three months prior to July 1, 2015, may count toward the first year training requirements for all directors, managers, and staff. So training received on or after April 1, 2015, may count toward the training requirements for school year 2015–2016.

- **What are the training requirements for program staff who work less than 20 hours per week?**

The final rule establishes a requirement of 4 hours of annual training. Establishing a uniform number of training hours for this group of employees is intended to keep the training requirements simple and feasible for all LEAs.

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- **I started my job after the start of the school year, what do I have to do?**

For flexibility, anyone hired after January 1 is only required to complete half of the required training hours for their position by the end of that school year. This applies to directors, managers and staff.

- **When do I need to take my training?**

If allowed by your State Agency, you may complete the required training hours over a period of two school years, provided that some training hours are completed each school year.

- **Can annual training for directors only be in administrative practices like application, certification, verification, meal counting and meal claiming procedures?**

Per the technical corrections to the final rule published by USDA on May 7, 2015, annual training must include, but is not limited to, administrative practices (including training in application, certification, verification, meal counting and meal claiming procedures) as applicable, and any other specific topics identified by FNS, as needed, to address program integrity or other critical issues.

- **In what areas is training required?**

There are four key training areas:

- Nutrition
- Operations
- Administration
- Communications/Marketing

More specific topic areas include:

Training Topics	
Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Administrative practices (including application, certification, verification, meal counting and meal claiming procedures)</li><li>• Food Safety</li></ul>
Managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Administrative practices (including application, certification, verification, meal counting and meal claiming procedures)</li><li>• Identification of reimbursable meals at the point of service</li><li>• Nutrition, health and safety standards</li></ul>
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Free and reduced price eligibility</li><li>• Application, certification and verification procedures</li><li>• Identification of reimbursable meals at the point of service</li><li>• Nutrition, health and safety standards</li></ul>

For all staff, USDA may require specific training to address Program integrity and other critical issues.

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- **Does the required training have to be in a specific format or provider?**

No, training can be provided in a variety of formats including online training, in-person and webinars. Also the training can be from a number of providers including SNA, NFSMI, USDA or in-house.

- **Where can I find the appropriate training opportunities/resources?**

SNA provides a number of training resources for you including:

- Conferences & meetings
- Free webinars
- Professional Development Articles
- School Nutrition University (SNU)

For more information visit [www.schoolnutrition.org](http://www.schoolnutrition.org).

USDA has also created an online database of training opportunities and resources which is available at <http://professionalstandards.nal.usda.gov/>

- **How do I keep track of my training and what documentation is required?**

Copies of the following documentation is acceptable:

- Training Agenda
- Sign-in sheets
- Certificate of Completion
- Other paper documents

Each SFA must decide how to maintain the records that document training completion. The school nutrition program director is ultimately responsible for demonstrating, during the administrative review, that the SFA is in compliance with the professional standards.

To assist individuals in tracking their training, FNS is developing a downloadable tool that will be available for tracking the training individuals have completed at the SFA level. SNA is also developing some tips and ideas on how to track training.

## HIRING STANDARDS

- **What are the hiring standards for school nutrition directors by local education agency size?**

For the position of school nutrition program director, this final rule sets minimum hiring standards for three distinct LEA size categories: LEAs with 2,499 students or less, LEAs with 2,500–9,999 students, and LEAs with 10,000 or more students.

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The detailed requirements are listed in SNA's *Summary of Hiring Requirements for School Nutrition Program Directors* which are available at [www.schoolnutrition.org/professionalstandards](http://www.schoolnutrition.org/professionalstandards).

- **I am the Director for multiple districts of varying size, which enrollment category must I meet the requirements for?**

Your requirement category is based on the TOTAL number of students for all of the districts you manage, not an average.

- **Help! My level of education doesn't meet the new standards for my current position. What does this mean?**

The final rule provides that school nutrition program directors can continue to serve in their current position as they will be grandfathered in, and will not be required to meet the new hiring standards.

Grandfathered directors can transfer to another position in an LEA of the same size category. However, to move to a larger LEA size, a grandfathered program director must meet the hiring standards established for the larger LEA.

Grandfathering does not apply to continuing education/annual training because all personnel, at both the State and local levels, need annual continuing education/training to maintain or upgrade their skills.

## FUNDING

- **What funding is available to help with the implementation of the professional standards requirements?**

Annual continuing education/training is an allowable use of the nonprofit school food service account and of State Administrative Expense funds.

However, the cost of college credits incurred by an individual to meet the hiring standards for the positions of State director or SFA director is not an allowable expense. Meeting the hiring standards is the sole responsibility of a job applicant.

Additionally, USDA will award competitive grants to State agencies to assist with implementation of the professional standards requirements. Up to \$150,000 may be requested per State agency for the anticipated funding period of October 1, 2015–September 31, 2017.

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## MORE INFORMATION

- For complete details about USDA's Professional Standards the final rule is available to download at <https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2015/03/02/2015-04234/professional-standards-for-state-and-local-school-nutrition-programs-personnel-as-required-by-the>