

USDA Allows Exemption to Hiring Standards for Child Nutrition Directors

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Regulatory Authority: 7CFR 210.30-School Nutrition Program Professional Standards; 42 U.S.C.1751-1760, 1779

Response Required: No

Attention: Superintendents, Principals, Directors, Managers, Human Resources, Hiring Managers

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On April 25, 2024 the United States Department of Agriculture released the Final Rule, [Child Nutrition Programs: Meal Patterns Consistent With the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). A section of this Final Rule revised the professional standards for hiring of Child Nutrition Directors.

The Final Rule allows state agencies to approve hiring of child nutrition directors that do not meet the educational requirements of:

- Districts of 2,500 to 9,999 students:
 - Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with academic major or concentration in food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field; **OR**
 - Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with any academic major or area of concentration, and a state recognized certificate for school nutrition directors; **OR**
 - Bachelor's degree in any academic major and at least 2 years of relevant school nutrition program experience; **OR**
 - Associate's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with academic major or concentration in food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field, and at least 2 years of relevant school nutrition program experience, and

- Districts of 10,000 or more students:
 - Bachelor’s degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with academic major or concentration in food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field; **OR**
 - Bachelor’s degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with any academic major or area of concentration, and a state recognized certificate for school nutrition directors; **OR**
 - Bachelor’s degree in any major and at least 5 years of experience in management of school nutrition programs.

As long as the district provides documentation that the recommended candidate meets the following:

- ten (10) years of school nutrition experience for the employee that the district chooses to hire. The ten (10) years does not have to be consecutive service or service within a single school district;
- the prospective child nutrition director has a high school diploma or has completed a GED.

Districts choosing to initiate this exemption, should complete the [Request for Hiring Exemption Form](#), then email to sheila.chastain@ade.arkansas.gov with required supporting documentation as indicated on the form.

This final rule also codifies in regulation that State agencies may determine what counts as “equivalent educational experience” for the hiring standards. USDA provided the following examples in the proposed rule, which were supported by a national organization representing tens of thousands of school nutrition professionals:

- If a candidate for a director position in a medium local educational agency does not have an associate’s degree, but has more than 60 college credits in a relevant field, the State agency would have the discretion to approve the hiring of that candidate.
- If a candidate for a director position in a large local educational agency does not have a bachelor’s degree, but has an associate’s degree, is a School Nutrition Specialist certified by the School Nutrition Association, and is a Nutrition and Dietetics Technician, Registered (NDTR) certified by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, then the State agency has the discretion to approve the hiring of that candidate.

These are just two possible scenarios where a State agency may choose to count a candidate’s experience toward the hiring requirements as “equivalent educational experience.” State agencies have discretion to determine that other types of experience should count toward “equivalent educational experience” on case-by-case basis.

USDA expects that these changes will allow highly experienced and qualified individuals to advance their careers in school nutrition. These changes are also expected to ease hiring challenges which USDA understands are experienced by some medium and large local educational agencies.

RECORD KEEPING REQUIREMENTS:

As described in 7 CFR 210.15(b)(7), school food authorities must maintain records to demonstrate compliance with the professional standards for school nutrition program directors, managers, and personnel, including the hiring requirements. This final rule does not change the overall recordkeeping requirements for professional standards.

However, to demonstrate compliance when using this exemption, the school food authority would need to maintain documentation of approval of the Request for Exemption.

This final rule does not change the Administrative Review requirements for professional standards. Professional standards will continue to be evaluated as part of the General Areas of Review, as described at 7 CFR 210.18(h)(2)(ix).

This Final Rule takes effect July 1, 2024.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

[Professional Standards | Food and Nutrition Service \(usda.gov\)](#)

[Request for Hiring Exemption Form](#)