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Washington Office of Superintendent of  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**  
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

k12.wa.us

July 1, 2024

- Action Required
- Due date: Varies
- Informational

BULLETIN NO. 045-24 CHILD NUTRITION SERVICES

TO: Educational Service District Superintendents  
School District Superintendents  
School District Business Managers  
School District Food Service Supervisors  
Administrators of Select Private Schools

FROM: Chris Reykdal, Superintendent of Public Instruction

RE: Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit Application and Materials for  
School Year 2024–25

CONTACT: Child Nutrition Services Program Specialists

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## PURPOSE/BACKGROUND

All Local Education Agencies (LEAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) must make free and reduced-price meals available to all qualifying students. Beginning in school year 2024–25, all LEAs, including those operating CEP or Provision 2 district-wide, must distribute the Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit

(CNEEB) Application. The CNEEB Application merges the free and reduced-price meal application and family income survey. Through submission of the CNEEB Application, households may qualify for:

- Free and reduced-price meal benefits,
- Summer EBT benefits (if enrolled in a NSLP/SBP school),
- Reduced fees for other programs and activities, and/or
- Help secure other educational funding for the LEA.

Application materials help LEAs determine eligibility status and must be distributed before the school year begins, as well as made available to all households throughout the year. Materials are updated each year to reflect changes to income guidelines and program regulations.

## CHILD NUTRITION ELIGIBILITY & EDUCATION BENEFIT APPLICATIONS AND MATERIALS

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) annually releases updated income guidelines. Income guidelines, effective July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025, and accompanying materials can be found on the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) [Application & Verification webpage](#).

Letters to Households and CNEEB Applications must be distributed to families each school year after July 1. These materials inform households of the meal programs available to the students, that meals may be available at a free or reduced-price, and that they may qualify for Summer EBT benefits. USDA governs application requirements including the following:

- Materials must be made available in a language parents and guardians understand. Use the [Limited English Proficiency \(LEP\) Reference Sheet](#) for more information.
- LEAs must distribute the state prototype Letter to Households and Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit Application.
- Applications, scanned and online, must be updated to reflect current regulations. Use the [Application Materials – Web-Based & Scanned Reference Sheet](#) for more details.
- The Letter to Households must include the name of the hearing official and the individual who can provide alternative means of communication to persons who require program information in other formats.
- Students in households determined to meet the guidelines for free or reduced-price meal eligibility should be categorized with the corresponding application code in the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS), Appendix X.

[Revised Code of Washington \(RCW\) 28A.235.135](#) requires LEAs to provide meals at no cost to students enrolled at elementary schools where 30% or more of enrolled children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Schools operating under this requirement must continue to collect applications and claim meals according to free, reduced-price, or paid categories unless operating a Provision 2 cycle in a non-base year. Additional details on RCW 28A.235.135 can be found in Bulletin OXX-24: Meals for Washington Students – House Bill 1238.

## Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) & Provision 2

Beginning in school year 2024-25, CEP and Provision 2 non-base year schools will be required to distribute the CNEEB Application to annually collect household income data. The CNEEB Application may qualify households for: Summer EBT benefits, reduced fees for other programs and activities, and help secure other educational funding for the LEA. The Family Income Survey may not be distributed as it does not meet the requirements of a Summer EBT application.

The CNEEB Application is not used for the purposes of the NSLP/SBP in CEP and Provision 2 non-base year schools; therefore, staff time to distribute, collect, and process the CNEEB application cannot be paid for with non-profit school food service account funds. LEAs may use non-food service staff to complete this work or fund food service staff completing tasks related to the CNEEB Application at CEP and Provision 2 schools with another funding source. Additional information on Summer EBT can be found in [Bulletin 031-24: Summer EBT](#). Resources on the CNEEB Application and prototype letters can be found on the [Community Eligibility Provision and Provision 2 webpage](#).

## Available Materials

The following prototype application materials are available on the OSPI Child Nutrition Services (CNS) [Application and Verification Information webpage](#):

- [2024-25 Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit Application](#): The application allows households to apply for free and reduced-price meals, Summer EBT benefits, reduced fees for other programs, and secures other educational funding for the LEA.
- [Letter to Households – Public Schools](#): This letter is for public school districts, charter schools, and state-tribal education compact schools.
- [Letter to Households – Private Schools/Residential Child Care Institutions \(RCCIs\)](#): This letter is for private schools and RCCIs.
- [Letter to Households - Non-pricing/Provision](#): This letter is for non-pricing programs, including CEP, Provision 2, and elementary schools operating under HB 1238.

## PROCESSING APPLICATIONS

The [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#) is the USDA guiding document for determining household eligibility for meals and disclosure of free and reduced-price eligibility information. The most current manual is dated July 2017.

LEAs must ensure the following application processing requirements are met:

- Eligibility determinations are made within 10 working days.
- The [2024-25 Income Guidelines](#) are used to determine eligibility.
- Assign a hearing official and determining official. This cannot be the same individual.
  - The "*determining official*" is the individual(s) responsible for reviewing and approving CNEEB applications.
  - The "*hearing official*" is the individual responsible for reviewing and making a determination regarding an appeal to a benefit determination.

## Notification of Eligibility Determination

Local education agencies must notify households of their eligibility status. Households with children who are *approved* for Child Nutrition Program benefits may be notified either verbally or in writing. Households with children who are *denied* benefits must be provided with written notification of the denial through mail or email.

LEAs may use their own notification/denial letters, but the letter must include:

- Reason for denial of benefits,
- Right to appeal,
- Instructions on how to appeal,
- Ability to reapply for benefits at any time during the year if their household circumstances change; and
- USDA Non-Discrimination Statement.

## Pricing: Standard Counting & Claiming

Local education agencies may use the following prototype Notice of Eligibility letters available on the [Application & Verification webpage](#):

- [Notice of Eligibility for Child Nutrition Benefits – Public](#): This letter may be used to notify households of students who have been approved for free or reduced-price meals.
- [Notice of Eligibility for Free Meals – Directly Certified](#): This letter may be used to notify households of students who have been approved for free meals through Direct Certification.
- [Notice of Eligibility for Free Meals or Reduced-Price Meals – Direct Certification Medicaid](#): This letter may be used to notify households of students who have been approved for free or reduced-price meals through Direct Certification – Medicaid.

- [Notice of Approval/Denial of Child Nutrition Benefits - Public](#): This letter may be used to notify households of students who have been denied free or reduced-price meal benefits. Households with students who are denied must be given written notification of the denial.

### **Non-Pricing: CEP, Provision 2, HB 1238**

Local education agencies may use the following prototype Notice of Eligibility letters available on the [CEP & Provision 2 webpage](#):

- [Notice of Eligibility for Child Nutrition Benefits – Non-Pricing/Provision](#): This letter may be used to notify households of students who are eligible for Summer EBT benefits.
- [Notice of Eligibility for Free Meals – Directly Certified](#): This letter may be used to notify households of students who are eligible for Summer EBT benefits through Direct Certification.
- [Notice of Eligibility for Free Meals or Reduced-Price Meals – Direct Certification Medicaid](#): This letter may be used to notify households of students who are eligible for Summer EBT benefits through Direct Certification – Medicaid.
- [Notice of Approval/Denial of Child Nutrition Benefits – Non-Pricing/Provision](#): This letter may be used to notify households of students who have been denied Child Nutrition Program benefits. Households with students who are denied must be given written notification of the denial.

## **ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND INFORMATION**

### **Direct Certification**

LEAs must continue to perform direct certification at least monthly. Direct Certification is the process LEAs use to certify categorically eligible children for Child Nutrition Program benefits without further application. Students may be directly certified based on participation in assistance programs, including but not limited to Basic Food and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Consent to Share documentation must be obtained for directly certified students prior to sharing eligibility status. Best practices include conducting direct certification frequently at the beginning of the school year and sending a Consent to Share form with the notification of eligibility annually.

### **Verification**

Verification of free and reduced-price meal eligibility is an annual requirement for all LEAs that collect CNEEB applications for the purpose of determining free and reduced-price meal benefits. Qualifying LEAs include public school districts, private schools, and Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCIs) who operate standard counting and claiming or a Provision 2 Base

Year. Verification is the confirmation of current eligibility for free and reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP). Verification is only required when eligibility has been approved through the application process (not directly certified students). Schools that are operating CEP or Provision 2 in a non-base year are exempt from conducting verification. Results of verification must be reported annually by February 1.

### **Translations and Limited English Proficiency (LEP)**

The application materials and other communications with households concerning eligibility determinations must be made available in a language parents and guardians understand. OSPI provides notification and letter templates in multiple languages.

LEAs have the responsibility to be aware of the language needs of LEP households in their district. LEAs must also include an assurance there will be no discrimination against LEP households in their media release. The [Limited English Proficiency Reference Sheet](#) provides details on requirements.

### **Consent to Share Child Nutrition Program Eligibility Information for Other School Programs**

USDA confidentiality rules protect student and household information collected for determining free and reduced-price meal eligibility and Summer EBT benefits. Disclosure of eligibility information to programs not outlined in the National School Lunch Act (NSLA) requires parent or guardian consent. These programs include local programs and activities, such as fees for band, athletics, field trips, or Associated Student Body (ASB).

Parent or guardian consent must be obtained annually and prior to disclosure – households must also be able to limit consent to only those programs with which they wish to share information. If a child is directly certified, the LEA must have a system in place to obtain consent from these households before sharing their information.

Local education agencies that gather parent or guardian consent for local programs that offer reduced fees for students from low-income households can use the [Consent to Share Child Nutrition Program Eligibility Information for Other School Programs form](#). This form may be included with the letter to households sent home at the beginning of the school year or with the letter notifying households they have been directly certified or approved for Child Nutrition Program benefits.

### **Media Release for School Meal Programs**

The USDA requires LEAs to notify the public about the availability of school meal programs. OSPI provides an annual public release to the media that meets this regulation. However, LEAs are encouraged to provide a release and a supply of CNEEB application forms to local

organizations providing assistance to low-income families such as food banks; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinics; post offices; and employment security offices.

## Civil Rights Requirements

Local education agencies participating in USDA school meal programs are required to inform potentially eligible persons of their rights to receive program benefits. The [USDA Civil Rights Nondiscrimination Statement](#) must be placed on program materials widely disseminated to students and families. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Student handbooks containing program information
- School nutrition services webpages
- Letters to families
- Menus and brochures
- Online applications

Washington state has additional protected classes that are not outlined in the USDA Civil Rights Nondiscrimination Statement. Public School Districts and Public Charter Schools must put both the USDA, and the schools' non-discrimination statement on widely disseminated program materials.

Please review the [Civil Rights Reference Sheet](#) for more information on requirements in Child Nutrition Programs.

## INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

For questions regarding this bulletin please contact your assigned program specialist or call the OSPI TTY number at 360-664-3631.

This bulletin is also available on the [Bulletins](#) page of the OSPI website.

Tennille Jeffries-Simmons  
Chief of Staff

Leanne Eko  
Chief Nutrition Officer  
Child Nutrition Services

CR:ln

### **Assurance of Civil Rights Compliance**

*In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.*

*Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339.*

*To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete [Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#), 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](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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