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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

April 15, 2026

(X) Action Required
Due date: June 30, 2026
(X) Informational

BULLETIN NO. 015-26 Child Nutrition Services

TO: Educational Service District Superintendents
School District Superintendents
School District Business Managers
School Food Service Supervisors
School District Human Resources

FROM: Chris Reykdal, Superintendent of Public Instruction

RE: SY 2026–27 State Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Requirements and Considerations

CONTACT: Liz Beechler, Director of School Meal Programs
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PURPOSE/BACKGROUND

The Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.235.300 requires Local Education Agencies (LEAs) that operate the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) with an Identified Student Percentage (ISP) of 40% or greater to implement the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This includes charter schools established under RCW 28A.710 and state-tribal education compact schools established under RCW 28A.715. This bulletin describes the steps to apply for and implement CEP in school year 2026–27.

Community Eligibility Provision

CEP is a non-pricing meal service option under the NSLP and School Breakfast Program (SBP). CEP allows schools, with a high number of directly certified students, to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students.

The USDA released the [Child Nutrition Programs: CEP – Increasing Options for Schools Final Rule](#) in September 2023 which decreased the minimum Identified Student Percentage (ISP) required to operate CEP. To be eligible for CEP, a school must have an ISP of 25% or greater as of April 1. The calculation for ISP is as follows: the number of Identified Students divided by the number of enrolled students, multiplied by 100.

Identified Students are those who are categorically eligible for free school meals without a meal application. This includes, but is not limited to, students directly certified through Basic Food, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and students experiencing homelessness, in foster care or receiving Migrant Education Program Services, certain Medicaid programs, Head Start, Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP), and Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). For additional information on identified students, please review the [CEP Reference Sheet](#).

LEAs can and are encouraged to group schools together to allow schools that would not qualify by themselves to participate in the program. Grouping works by combining numbers of Identified Students and enrollment from multiple schools and then applying the same calculation above.

Application Process

OSPI released the [2026-27 CEP Eligibility Report](#) in April 2026. All LEAs with one or more schools estimated to have an ISP of 40% or greater must apply for CEP, if not currently operating CEP at the school(s). Applications must be submitted in the Washington Integrated Nutrition System (WINS) no later than **June 30, 2026**.

Use the SY 2026–27 CEP Application Checklist (*Attachment 1*) for step-by-step instructions. Additional resources are outlined below.

- [CEP Canvas Training Course](#)
- [Applying for CEP Using WINS Sponsor User Manual](#)
- [CEP Data Template](#)
- [CEP Agreement](#)

Key Considerations and Requirements in CEP

- **Breakfast and Lunch Served at No Cost to All Students**
All enrolled students at a school participating in CEP shall be able to receive a breakfast and lunch at no cost.
- **Meal Reimbursement Under CEP – Additional State Supplement**
Under CEP, meals are reimbursed using a formula instead of the eligibility of the student who received the meal (Paid, Reduced-Price, or Free). The ISP is multiplied by a federal multiplier of 1.6 to get the Free Claiming Percentage, the percent of meals that

are reimbursed at the federal free rate. All other meals are reimbursed at the paid rate. Washington state supplements each paid meal in a school or group of schools with an overall ISP of 40% or greater providing reimbursement up to the federal, free rate.

Meals served at schools or a group of schools with an overall ISP of 25% or greater but less than 40% will be reimbursed according to their federal free and paid claiming percentages. State supplemental funds will **not** be provided. LEAs may use non-profit school food service account funds to support CEP. However, LEAs should ensure that using non-profit school food service account funds does not adversely impact the financial viability or overall sustainability of the school meal programs. If there is a difference between the cost of serving meals at no cost and funding available to support CEP, LEAs must pay the difference with non-federal dollars.

- **The Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit Application**

CEP schools must use the Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit (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 additional funding for the LEA.

Students in households with an income designation comparable to the free or reduced-price meal eligibility should be categorized with the corresponding Free or Reduced-Price designation in the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS). The CNEEB Application is not used for the purposes of individual student meal eligibility in CEP schools, therefore staff time to distribute, collect, and process the CNEEB Application cannot be paid for with Food Service Program funds. LEAs may use non-food service staff to complete this work or by funding food service staff with another fund source. Resources, including the CNEEB Application, are available on the [OSPI CEP webpage](#).

- **Learning Assistance Program (LAP) Hold Harmless**

RCW 28A.150.260 (10)(a) allows CEP schools and districts to be held harmless as it pertains to their LAP and LAP High Poverty funding:

- A. LAP Base: When calculating LAP Base funding each year, OSPI uses the greater Free and Reduced-Price Meal Eligibility Status or Low Income (FRPL) from two data sources:
 - The District FRPL percentage from the previous year (standard method) or,
 - The District FRPL percentage from the year immediately preceding the district's enrollment, in whole or in part, in CEP.
- B. LAP High Poverty: Schools that were eligible for LAP High Poverty in the year immediately before CEP adoption maintain this eligibility as long as the school remains on CEP, even if the prior-year FRPL percentage drops below the eligibility threshold.

Nothing prevents a school or district from increasing their FRPL while participating in CEP. Diligent CNEEB Application collection and Direct Certification is key to increasing these percentages.

- **National Board-Certified Teacher Bonus**

National Board-Certified Teachers may remain eligible for the additional "High Poverty Schools" bonus if they teach at a school that met the qualifications of a "High Poverty School" in either of the past two years preceding the school's participation in CEP, and for the duration of the school's participation in CEP.

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

For questions regarding this bulletin, please contact SchoolMeals@k12.wa.us or call 360-725-6200. The OSPI Telecommunication Relay Services number is 711 or 1-800-833-6384.

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

Tennille Jeffries-Simmons
Chief of Staff

Leanne Eko, RD, SNS
Chief Nutrition Officer
Child Nutrition Services

CR:ln

Attachment: SY 2026–27 CEP Application Checklist

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2. **Fax:** 833-256-1665 or 202-690-7442; or
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