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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

k12.wa.us

May 28, 2026



Action Required

Due date: Varies



Informational

BULLETIN NO. 020-26 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 2026-27

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

The Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit (CNEEB) Application is the tool used to collect and determine income eligibility status of students in Washington State. All LEAs must distribute the CNEEB Application. The CNEEB Application, *may* be used to qualify students for free and reduced-price meal benefits, Summer-EBT also known as SUN Bucks, reduced fees for programs and activities, and eligibility for the Washington College Bound Scholarship. Other state and local requirements may be required to qualify for benefits, in addition to the CNEEB Application. Collection of household income status also helps secure some educational funding for LEAs.

Application materials 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.

APPLICATIONS AND MATERIALS

Income guidelines are updated annually by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Income guidelines, effective July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027, 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 households each school year after July 1. These materials inform households about available meal programs that students may qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and that they may also be eligible 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 the CNEEB.
- 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.

Available Materials

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

- [2026-27 Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit Application](#):– The prototype application has been updated for 2026-27 to require an application identification number and allow households to indicate if they do not wish to receive benefits.
- [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 guidance document for determining household eligibility for meals and disclosure of free and reduced-price eligibility information. The most current manual is dated July 2017.

When the CNEEB Application is not used for the purposes of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), such as in CEP, Provision 2 non-base year schools, or schools not operating the NSLP; staff time to distribute, collect, and process the CNEEB application cannot be paid for with funds from the non-profit school food service account. 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.

LEAs must ensure the following application processing requirements are met:

- Eligibility determinations are made within 10 working days.
- The [2026-27 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

LEAs must notify households of their eligibility status. Households with children who are *approved* or *denied* for benefits must be notified in writing 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.

Notification letters are specific to Child Nutrition program participation and claiming options. Please review the letter templates available on the [Application & Verification webpage](#) and select the applicable templates. Templates have been updated to address [Summer-EBT Rights and Responsibilities](#), as applicable. LEAs should consult [B015-26: SY 2026-27 State Community](#)

[Eligibility Provision \(CEP\) Requirements and Considerations](#) and [B011-26: Meals for Washington Students and Provision 2](#) for additional details.

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND INFORMATION

Direct Certification

Direct Certification is the process LEAs use to certify categorically eligible children without further application. LEAs must perform direct certification at least monthly. 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 is the confirmation of the information reported on the CNEEB Application. LEAs are required to conduct verification for schools participating in the NSLP schools that are not operating under CEP or Provision 2 in a non-base year. Verification results must be reported annually by February 1. Applications utilized for Summer-EBT eligibility are subject to verification by the Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

Households are required to respond to verification requests, and eligibility must be confirmed to receive Child Nutrition program benefits.

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.

Qualification Codes

LEAs are required to assign qualification codes as described in [Appendix X](#) of the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS). Please note Code 25 is now only used for qualifying students with no access to meal programs.

Consent to Share Eligibility Information

Confidentiality rules protect student and household information collected for determining free and reduced-price meal eligibility and SUN Bucks 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.

Promotion of the CNEEB and Media Release

Promoting and encouraging households to complete the CNEEB can significantly improve the rate of return. A robust collection of the CNEEB ensures LEAs accurately capture income data and helps households access benefits.

OSPI provides multiple tools to assist in CNEEB promotion and collection efforts including;

- [CNEEB promotional video](#)
- [CNEEB Instructions](#)
- [CNEEB toolkit with promotional materials and social media posts](#)

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.

BULLETIN NO. 020-26 CNS

May 28, 2026

Page 6

INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

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

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

Jenny Plaja
Chief Impact Officer

Leanne Eko
Chief Nutrition Officer
Child Nutrition Services

CR:In

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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

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