



Providing for the Legislatively Mandated Statewide Family Meal Application System

2023–25 Biennial Operating Budget Decision Package

Recommendation Summary

In 2022, the Legislature passed House Bill 1833, requiring OSPI to initiate and oversee the development and implementation of a statewide electronic system where families can easily apply for free and reduced-price meals; or in schools where all meals are free, submit a Family Income Survey. An implementation plan including a cost analysis, timeline, and system requirements are being developed in advance of the report to the Legislature due December 1, 2022. This zero-dollar request aims to serve as a placeholder for the potential biennial costs associated with developing and implementing a statewide system.

Fiscal Details (Funding, FTEs, Revenue, Objects)

This request does not yet have funding included. Funding detail will be identified and provided to the Legislature by December 1, 2022, once implementation planning is complete.

Package Description

What is the problem, opportunity, or priority you are addressing with the request?

Washington does not have a statewide system for families to apply for free or reduced-price meals. Instead, families rely on paper forms from their school district or district-specific online applications.

House Bill 1833 (2022) requires that the statewide meal application system remove barriers that diminish access to meals and provide families with a secure and convenient way to apply for meals. In addition, the system will provide an accessible and simplified process for identifying and enrolling students in programs that provide other supports such as the summer EBT program and extracurricular fee waivers.

In addition, free and reduced-price meal data is utilized for other school programs and corresponding funding. For example, the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) and other educational programs are driven in part by the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Accurate data ensures districts and schools receive the correct amount of funding.

OSPI received \$36,000 in the 2022 Supplemental Budget to begin working to identify needs and to document requirements for a statewide meal application system. However, funding was not provided for the cost of procuring the system. It was understood that the request for funding the system would come following the report due December 1, 2022.

What is your proposed solution?

OSPI is requesting funding to build a statewide meal application system in the 2023–25 biennium. Total costs will be determined through the implementation plan and cost analysis which will be submitted to the Legislature in December 2022. Funding of the system in the upcoming budget will allow development to begin quickly and get the product ready as soon as possible.

Funds will allow for the creation and operation of an online, user-friendly meal application/Family Income Survey system that will be available in multiple languages, as required by the new legislation.

What are you purchasing and how does it solve the problem?

By December 1, 2022, OSPI will provide an initial report to the Legislature as required in House Bill 1833 (2022). This report will cover the estimated cost, timeline, and specifics of the new system. There will be initial development costs along with ongoing operations and maintenance costs after implementation of the new system.

What alternatives did you explore and why was this option chosen?

N/A - OSPI is charged to begin this work per House Bill 1833 (2022).

Performance Measures

Performance outcomes:

With this funding, OSPI will develop and implement an online statewide system for families to apply for free and reduced-price meals and submit a Family Income Survey.

This system will:

- Remove barriers that diminish access to free and reduced-price meals;
- Provide a secure and convenient online portal for household use;
- Provide an accessible, simple process for enrolling students in programs that provide benefits;
- Comply with all state and federal laws; and
- Include robust safeguards to ensure family income data is protected and secure.

Assumptions and Calculations

Cost assumptions and timelines will be reported to the Legislature by December 1, 2022.

Expansion or alteration of a current program or service:

N/A

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

Cost and timelines will be reported to the Legislature by December 1, 2022.

Workforce assumptions:

Cost and timelines will be reported to the Legislature by December 1, 2022.

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

An online statewide U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) meal application/Family Income Survey system will improve equity in the state by ensuring all families have access to a convenient, secure system in their language to apply. This system will be significantly easier than the current paper forms and will allow for easier translation services.

Strategic and Performance Outcomes

Strategic framework:

This package aligns with Governor Inslee's Goal #1: World-class education, as well as Goal #5: Efficient, effective, and accountable government.

Access to free school meals is vital for many families and provides children with the nutrition they need to succeed in school. We know that many families are eligible, yet they do not apply for various reasons. This easy system would remove several of the barriers in place to applying via paper application.

Free and reduced-price meal eligibility data is utilized in many ways, including providing additional benefits and supports to children and funding allocations for education programs. Use of a statewide system will improve accuracy and efficiency in the collecting and sharing of these data.

Other Collateral Connections

Intergovernmental:

The state Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) provides data to OSPI to facilitate direct certification, the process where families are automatically enrolled in free school meals based on their participation in another needs-based program. This new statewide system would interface with the existing OSPI's direct certification system.

School districts would also be impacted. Currently many school districts purchase and support their own online meal application system. A statewide system could decrease district costs and streamline efforts.

Stakeholder response:

The Washington School Nutrition Association (WSNA), along with several other education stakeholders, supported the underlying bill, House Bill 1833 (2022), in committee.

Legal or administrative mandates:

N/A

Changes from current law:

N/A

State workforce impacts:

N/A

State facilities impacts:

N/A

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Other Documents

Reference documents:

N/A