

OSPI School Meal Programs Reference Sheet

Paid Lunch Equity Exemption

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) allows Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in strong financial standing to request an exemption from increasing paid lunch prices and/or contributing nonfederal funds to the school food service account.

Requirements

- LEAs must be able to demonstrate that they have a positive or zero balance in the non-profit school food service account as of June 30 of the second preceding school year (i.e., June 30, 2023 for an exemption in school year 2024–25).
- LEAs must request an exemption from OSPI with submission of their annual renewal application for the NSLP/SBP.

Requesting an Exemption:

- Requests must be received by **September 1** of each year for consideration.
- To request an exemption, carefully evaluate the financial standing of the non-profit school food service account:
 - Include the PLE Exemption Request in the Renewal Survey submitted annually.
 - Upload documentation demonstrating the positive balance in the non-profit school food service account as of June 30 of the second preceding school year, such as the General Ledger 828 or the F-196.
- Approved exemptions are good for one year only.

Note: USDA regulations require that LEAs operate a non-profit school food service account. Revenue must be retained in program 98 and used to improve the quality of the food service program. Funds in excess of the three-month operating balance limit should be used to improve meals served and upgrade cafeteria equipment. Consider all aspects of food service operations that could benefit from these funds, including meeting new meal pattern requirements, implementing Smart Snacks standards, and Local School Wellness Policies.



Reference

- [7 CFR 210.14\(e\)](#)

Resources

- [Paid Lunch Equity Resources](#)

Acronym Reference

- FDP – Food Distribution Program
- LEA – Local Education Agency
- OSPI – Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- NSLP – National School Lunch Program
- PLE – Paid Lunch Equity
- SBP – School Breakfast Program
- USDA – United States Department of Agriculture