



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Sponsors of School Child Nutrition Programs

FROM: John Frassinelli, Chief
Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education

DATE: April 21, 2014

SUBJECT: Operational Memorandum #26-14
Paid Lunch Equity: Guidance for School Year 2014-15

This memorandum extends through School Year (SY) 2014-15 the availability of an exemption to the Paid Lunch Equity (PLE) requirement for certain School Food Authorities (SFAs) in strong financial standing, as described below. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) initially provided an exemption in memorandum outlined in [OM 53-13](#), "PLE: Guidance for SY 2013-14", following publication of the interim rule "National School Lunch Program: School Food Service Account Revenue Amendments Related to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010". Extending the PLE exemption for another year will allow FNS to continue to gather feedback and experience with the exemption in order to inform future policy considerations, including a final rule.

In SY 2014-15, FNS instructs state agencies to exempt an SFA from the PLE requirements if the SFA requesting the exemption has been certified as meeting the meal pattern requirements and can demonstrate that the required increase to paid lunch prices or revenue contributions would cause the SFA to exceed the 3-month operating balance limit. In making an exemption determination, the state agency will use the list of Factors for Consideration (provided below) and must also consider whether there are other necessary or appropriate uses for the SFA's funds. In some instances, those funds might be better used to operate or improve the program, to meet program requirements and goals, or to address deficiencies in program operations.

The state agency will evaluate all aspects of food service operations including meal costs, a la carte sales and compliance with future requirements (e.g., the Smart Snacks in Schools standards) when determining whether to grant an exemption in SY 2014-15.

Because the financial standing of a school food service account may change from year to year, those SFAs that were exempted in SY 2013-14 must request a new exemption for SY 2014-15 and provide their state agency with the proper documentation to be considered for the exemption.

PLE Exemption – Factors for Consideration

Below are factors state agencies must consider when evaluating school food authority (SFA) requests for exemption from the paid lunch equity requirement. State agencies must use these questions as a guide when assessing whether there are necessary or appropriate uses for funds, which would otherwise contribute to an excess operational balance to address deficiencies in Program operations and meet new program requirements. Additionally, the State must review other aspects of program operation with the SFA to assess whether overall program quality is high enough to justify an exemption. The list is not intended to be exhaustive; States may assess

other relevant aspects of program operation at their discretion. States should consider the totality of an SFA's responses and overall program operation when granting exemptions. At a minimum, the following questions must be answered in the affirmative.

Meal Standards

Is the SFA certified as meeting the updated meal pattern requirements?

Is the SFA financially prepared to meet future meal pattern requirements (e.g. future sodium, targets)?

Competitive Foods

Is the SFA taking specific steps toward meeting the new Smart Snacks in Schools standards for items sold from the school food service account, and does it have any projected financial considerations associated with these changes?

Administrative Reviews

Has the SFA corrected all deficiencies, implemented all corrective actions and complied with any fiscal action identified in the most recent Administrative Review Report?

Additional Considerations: The State should also consider the questions below to determine whether overall program quality is high enough to warrant providing the exemption.

Are there simple menu improvements that could be made that would encourage students to eat healthier meals and make the program more appealing? For example:

- Has the SFA considered expanding offerings of fresh fruit and vegetables, and/or expanded variety of fruit and vegetables? Does the SFA use salad bars?
- Is student acceptance/participation strong? Has the SFA made efforts to engage students in meal planning, taste testing, etc.?
- Has the SFA established and implemented a wellness policy with the required elements?
- Does the SFA comply with all requirements and follow best practices with regard to preventing overt identification?
- Does the SFA utilize signage, food placement and other marketing techniques effectively to promote the selection of reimbursable meals?

Resource Management

Has the SFA previously met all paid lunch equity requirements?

If applicable, is the SFA currently meeting all non-program food revenue requirements?

Professional Support

Does the SFA have all child nutrition staff vacancies filled? (If vacancies are primarily due to lack of funding, rather than other factors, an exemption should typically **not** be approved, since the funds that would be provided to the SFA through the PLE requirement could be used to fund staff).

Cafeteria and Kitchen Equipment

Does the SFA have necessary cafeteria and kitchen equipment for storing, preparing, and serving healthy meals and competitive foods?

If the SFA has applied for federal grants to purchase equipment needed to serve healthier meals but has not received funding, did the SFA use its own funds to accomplish the proposed activities?

Certification

Has the SFA done everything within its ability to improve the certification process to increase access to the program (e.g., maximize use of direct certification including homeless, runaway, migrant and foster children, etc.)?

Questions may be directed to:

Consultants for School Nutrition Programs	
County	Consultant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fairfield County 	Fionnuala Brown fionnuala.brown@ct.gov 860-807-2129
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hartford County (towns/cities beginning with A-R) 	Teri Dandeneau teri.dandeneau@ct.gov 860-807-2079
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hartford County (towns/cities beginning with S-W) Windham County 	Susan Alston susan.alston@ct.gov 860-807-2081
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Litchfield County 	Allison Calhoun-White allison.calhoun-white@ct.gov 860-807-2008
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middlesex County Tolland County 	Andy Paul andrew.paul@ct.gov 860-807-2048
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Haven County 	Jackie Schipke jackie.schipke@ct.gov 860-807-2123
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New London County 	Monica Pacheco monica.pacheco@ct.gov 860-807-2073

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