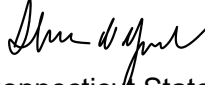




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Sponsors of the National School Lunch Program

FROM: Shannon K. Yearwood, Bureau Chief 
Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, Connecticut State Department of Education

DATE: May 5, 2026

SUBJECT: Operational Memorandum No. 08-26
Paid Lunch Equity Guidance for School Year 2026-27

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently issued guidance addressing the Paid Lunch Equity (PLE) tool for school year (SY) 2025-26. [USDA Memo SP 06-2026: Paid Lunch Equity: Guidance for School Year 2026-2027](#) explains the PLE exemption provided by section 743 of the Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026 (Public Law 119-37, the 2026 Appropriations Act), enacted on November 12, 2025.

Under the 2026 Appropriations Act, for SY 2026-2027, only school food authorities (SFAs) that had a negative balance in the nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA) as of June 30, 2025, are required to establish a price for paid lunches according to the PLE regulations. An SFA's NSFSA June 30, 2025, balance can be found in the Connecticut Online Application and Claiming System for Child Nutrition Programs (CNP System) Financial Report under line 3f, Computed Operating Position. Any SFA with a positive or zero balance in its NSFSA as of June 30, 2025, is exempt from PLE pricing requirements.

If the documented weighted average student lunch price was a **minimum of \$4.16** for SY 2025-26, the SFA is not required to complete the PLE tool or request an exemption for SY 2026-27.

SFAs Qualifying for the SY 2026-2027 PLE Exemption

1. SFAs that qualify for the PLE exemption for SY 2026-2027, as indicated above, are still required to use their current student price or establish a new paid lunch price; however, they are not required to comply with the PLE pricing requirements or use the PLE tool. To request an exemption, the SFA must complete the [Paid Lunch Equity Exemption Request](#) and submit to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) by **June 30, 2026**. To receive the exemption, all questions must be completed and submitted by one of the SFA's two authorized signers. This includes attesting to having a positive or zero balance in the NSFSA as of June 30, 2025. **Note:** The CSDE may request to review the SFA's documentation to support the exemption.

2. If the NSFSA has a positive balance and the SFA does not request an exemption by June 30, 2026, the SFA will be required to establish prices for paid lunches according to the PLE provisions. This includes completing the SY 2026-27 PLE Tool.

SFAs Not Qualifying for the SY 2026 2027 PLE Exemption

1. If the NSFSA has a negative balance as of June 30, 2025, the SFA must follow the PLE requirements according to [7 CFR 210.14\(e\)](#) when establishing their paid lunch prices for SY 2026-2027. SFAs may use the [USDA's SY 2026-27 PLE tool](#) or an equivalent procedure to determine their required paid lunch prices.
2. When establishing paid lunch prices using the PLE tool or an equivalent procedure, SFAs may use the most recent student paid prices approved by the board of education.

Special Considerations

An SFA that did not charge for meals during SY 2025-26, such as an SFA that operated the Community Eligibility Provision and is returning to standard counting and claiming in SY 2026-27, may use the most recent paid lunch price data as the basis for its SY 2026-27 paid lunch calculation. An SFA that is unable to find documentation of the last paid meal price charged to students must follow FNS guidance for new schools found in [USDA Memo SP 39-2011: Guidance on Paid Lunch Equity and Revenue from Nonprogram Foods](#).

As a reminder, consistent with [7 CFR 210.14\(e\)\(4\)\(i\)](#), SFAs are not required to raise their paid lunch price by more than 10 cents for SY 2026-27 from the last year they charged for paid lunches. SFAs may still choose to raise the price by more than 10 cents.

Changes Effective in SY 2026-27

Effective SY 2026-27, SFAs will no longer be permitted to request the PLE exemption for the purpose of using NSFSA funds to lower or eliminate the household costs for one National School Lunch Program meal per day for students eligible for paid meals served in SY 2026-27. Additionally, SFAs that had a zero or positive balance in the NSFSA as of June 30, 2025, will not be permitted to use NSFSA funds to offset students' unpaid meal charges incurred in SY 2026-27 for reimbursable meals.

Questions may be directed to your [CSDE school nutrition team member](#).

SKY:tdd

Important: This is a numbered Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) operational memorandum that contains important program information. Please read carefully and retain for future reference. All CSDE operational memoranda are posted on the CSDE's [Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

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