

Paid Lunch Equity: Guidance for SY 2025-2026

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Regulatory Authority: 7 CFR 210.14(e), Section 748, of Division B of the Appropriations Act, for SY 2025-2026, SP 12-2025

Response Required: Yes

Attention: Superintendents, Child Nutrition Directors and Managers

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The purpose of this memo is to provide guidance for paid lunch pricing in Child Nutrition Programs for the 2025-2026 school year. The Paid Lunch Equity (PLE) tool is used to determine the weighted average price of a paid lunch prices for student meals or the amount of non-federal funds that must be put into the non-profit food service account. Under Section 748, the Consolidated Appropriations Act for school year 2025-2026 and [SP 12-2025](#), only a School Food Authority (SFA) having a negative balance in the nonprofit school food service account as of June 30, 2024, will be required to complete the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) PLE Tool. School districts with a zero or positive balance are exempt from this requirement but need to retain documentation showing the zero or positive balance as of June 30, 2024.

While not required, exempt SFAs may still use the PLE tool to complete the steps necessary to determine their target SY 2025-2026 paid lunch price, consistent with program regulations at [7 CFR 210.14\(e\)](#), and adjust their paid lunch prices accordingly.

SFAs who complete the paid lunch equity tool are required to keep the tool on file for audit purposes for five years plus the current year. SFAs may use the prices they last charged students as the basis for their SY 2025-2026 paid lunch price calculation, even if those prices were charged during a year the SFA was not required to comply with PLE requirements. For example, SFAs that were exempt from completing the PLE tool last school year but changed their meal prices may use prices charged during SY 2024-2025 to determine their PLE requirement for SY 2025-2026.

SFAs that did not charge for meals during SY 2024-2025, such as an SFA that operated under a special provision and is returning to standard counting and claiming in SY 2025-2026, may use the most recent paid lunch price data as the basis for SY 2025-2026 paid lunch calculation. If an SFA is unable to find documentation of the last paid meal price charged to students, then it must follow [Paid Lunch Equity Guidance](#).

SFAs should could continue to use the [2024-2025 PLE Tool Flowchart](#) USDA developed to help SFAs understand how to utilize the PLE tool.

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 2025-2026 from the last year they charged for paid lunches. SFAs can still choose to raise the price by more than 10 cents.

All SFAs are required to complete the [Paid Lunch Equity Google Form](#) detailing their exemption or non-exemption status. The google form submission is due by **Friday, July 18, 2025**.

If you have any questions, please contact your Area Specialist at 501-324-9502.

Attachments:

[SY 25-26 Paid Lunch Equity Tool](#)