

Establishing Student Eligibility in Child Nutrition Programs

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Response Required: No

Attention: Superintendents, Child Nutrition Directors and Managers

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The purpose of this memo is to inform districts of upcoming eligibility training sessions and encourage districts to ensure accurate reflections of the needs of their student populations by promoting the completion of school meal applications.

A student's eligibility for free or reduced priced meals may be determined through the use of direct certification, categorical eligibility, or income application.

When families and schools partner to complete Free and Reduced-Price Meal Applications, both benefit from:

- Free and Reduced Price Meals to eligible students
- Access to ACT testing at no cost to the family
- Access to concurrent credit opportunities at no cost to the family
- Access to discounted rate for internet services and other supports

Districts should strongly encourage households to complete a meal application for students who are not directly certified or categorically eligible. Allowable practices in the collection of applications can include, but are not limited to:

- Sharing with parents and guardians the benefits for both families and schools.
- Providing community outreach to encourage households to submit applications for meal benefits.
- Providing families with a school contact who will provide additional information and answer questions.
- Remind families that participating in school meals or completing an application does not affect the student's or family's SNAP benefits.

- Reassuring families that schools maintain the confidentiality of families that complete meal applications.
- Providing the community information regarding free and reduced price meals by posting applications in parent centers, post offices, grocery stores, unemployment offices, county health units, and other community buildings.
- Utilizing technology (social media, emails, apps, websites, etc.) to remind families that meal applications must be renewed at the beginning of each school year and that meal benefits are available to all students at any time during the school year.
- Make additional contact with households that have not completed an application for school year 2024-25, especially when that household qualified for benefits in school year 2023-24, before the allowed carryover from the previous year's eligibility expires for the new school year.

Sample flyers and social media post can be found in the [Child Nutrition Resource Center](#).

Districts should consider distributing the "Public Release," which details the availability of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and provides information related to program eligibility, in the following locations:

- School and district websites and social media
- Local newspaper
- Local TV and radio stations
- Local businesses / employers / factories
- Local government offices i.e. Health Department, Department of Human Services, Department of Motor Vehicles
- Local churches, libraries, hospitals and clinics

Each district has determining official(s) to accurately determine the eligibility of students for free and reduced-price meals. These individuals are trained on the appropriate methods and requirements for approval and denial of all applications. The determining official will communicate with households if additional information or clarifications are needed prior to making the determination of the benefit.

Determining officials should refer to the [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#) for information on establishing student eligibility.

Income Eligibility Guidelines for the 2024-25 school year can be found [here](#).

Training Opportunities:

The Child Nutrition Unit will host a two-part series on establishing student eligibility.

Session 1: July 25, 2024, 1:00PM: Processing Free and Reduced Meal Applications: [Register HERE](#)

Session 2: August 1, 2024, 1:00PM: Direct Certification and Categorical Eligibility (Digital Learning): [Register HERE](#)

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