

Free & Reduced Price Meals

Frequently Asked Questions



Applications:

Q: Can the SNAP/TANF/FDPIR number be pre-filled in the case number section of the application?

A: No, the sponsor cannot pre-fill any part of the application except for the student name.

Q: Can additional district information be added to the application?

A: Yes, information can be added. For example, additional information release fields may be added. It must be clear that any additional fields are optional for families to complete and will not affect their eligibility if they do not complete the field.

Q: If changes are made to an application after the initial determination, where should the changes be recorded?

A: In the comments section or written on the paper application. Include the date, name of the person making the change, and initials.

Q: If an application only has the student's first name, but is missing the last name, is it incomplete?

A: Yes, follow up is required to collect the missing information.

Q: What if a family doesn't respond to repeated requests to fix an incomplete application.

A: USDA does not provide a time frame for this situation, but there should be adequate attempts to notify the household. If there is no response, the application will need to be denied and a written denial notice must be sent to the household.

Q: If preschoolers do not have access to meals (site is not participating), do they need to fill out the meal application?

A: No. Any student who does not have access to school meals should not complete an application unless they have a sibling who does have access to school meals. The Family Economic Data Survey (FEDS) is available to gather income information if needed for any schools or grades that do not participate in the school nutrition programs. Contact the CDE School Auditing Unit for information regarding the FEDS.

Q: If a student is listed as homeless on the application with other students certified with income but there is missing information for income (not for a homeless application), do we still process the homeless student?

A: Yes. Document the process for both types of certification and confirm the homeless status by speaking with the appropriate district liaison.

Q: What should be done when an application is received?

A: Some method for date stamping the application manually or electronically with initials or a signature should be done upon receipt of an application.



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Carryover:

Q: What if our district has different start dates for different grades at one school?

A: It is best practice to work with your system providers to allow each school and/or grade to accurately reflect the correct start date. If your system will only allow a start date by site, not grade, have the start date be the first day of school for the first grades at that site.

Q: Does carryover apply to eligible students who transfer from another school district?

A: Yes

Q: If a preschool or kindergarten student enrolls in school, does he/she get the carryover status from their sibling at the beginning of the year?

A: Yes

Q: What if an incomplete application is received, but the household has an active carryover status?

A: Follow up with the household to gather missing information, but the carryover status can remain active for the standard 30 days while the application is processed.

Q: Can carryover status be active longer than 30 days if the October count date is past the expiration of the carryover status?

A: Not for school nutrition purposes. While the October Count [does allow](#) past year status to remain in effect until the October Count date, for counting and claiming meals, student carryover status may only be active for 30 operating days.

Confidentiality/Disclosure:

Q: How do we handle information sharing when applications are completed by two parents in two different households?

A: The application information completed by one parent cannot be shared with the other parent.

Q: Can parents verbally confirm that it's ok to release information?

A: No, parent permission to share student information must be in writing. A template is available here: ([English](#)/[Spanish](#))

Q: Do district IT personnel need to sign a non-disclosure form when working with our student eligibility data?

A: It is best practice to have your IT personnel sign a non-disclosure form. However, they can have access to free and reduced eligibility information without a non-disclosure form if they need this as part of their job duty.

Q: Can computer vendors have access to the eligibility information in our computer system?

A: If computer vendors need limited access to be able to run the system, complete the non-disclosure form to ensure they have knowledge of the rules around disclosure.

Flexibility of Effective Date of Free and Reduced Meals Eligibility Determinations

Q: If a sponsor chooses to have the date of application submission be the effective date, must the sponsor complete an assurance every year?

A: Yes. The assurance form must be completed, signed and submitted to the School Nutrition Unit each school year. It must also be approved by the School Nutrition Unit.

Q: What if the household submits an incomplete application? Does this flexibility still apply?

A: This flexibility applies to eligibility determinations made through the application process and only to complete applications containing all required information at the time of submission.

Q: What are the requirements for claim adjustments if applicable for applications using the flexibility of effective date?

A: The same claim adjustment dates apply. Submissions/adjustments must be done with 60 days of the claim month.

Foster Children

Q: Are the payments received from the state to the foster parent considered income?

A: No. Payments received from the foster agency or court to the foster parent for the care of the child is considered to be income exclusion.

Q: If you approve a foster child as free but then the child is adopted, what do you do?

A: Benefits are valid for the entire school year plus the 30 days into the next school year.

Q: Can foster eligibility be determined verbally through a conversation with the county foster agency?

A: Yes. The conversation must be documented. It is best practice to obtain written documentation for foster children either through court documents or a letter from the human services agency.

Income Determination

Q: What if a child receives income, but it is not shared with the whole household?

A: The earnings of a child who is a full-time or regular part-time employee, or who receives income from other sources such as SSI or Social Security, must be listed on the application as income.

Q: What if an application has the income field left blank?

A: When no income is provided for any of the adult household members, the application is still considered complete and the income amount can be interpreted as zero.

Q: Does the household have to report income in dollars and cents?

A: No. Income should be reported in whole dollars.

Categorical Eligibility

Q: What if an application is filled out with some students marked migrant and some with income.

A: This is considered a mixed application. The migrant student would be free and the other

students' status would be based on income determination. Document the process for both types of certification and confirm the migrant status by speaking with the appropriate district liaison.

Q: Can an email from the migrant/homeless liaison be considered a valid means of verifying students as categorically eligible?

A: Yes. Ensure that your email system is a secure way to transfer student's names and eligibility information within your district. Migrant students can also be searched/matched in the online direct certification system.

Verification

Q: What if we have to replace an application? Do I need to replace it from the sample pool counted on October 1st?

A: Yes, you must select if from only those applications counted as of October 1st.

Q: If a household submits verification documentation without the household members form, can we confirm the household composition via a phone call?

A: No, you must obtain a completed household members form in writing. If the household responds to verification after 11/15, they must submit a new application. At that time, the new application can count as the "household member form".

Q: At the time of application, the household did not have income. When selected for verification income is being earned. Must the household report their current earnings?

A: No, per the Eligibility Manual documentation of income or receipt of assistance may be provided from any point in time between the month prior to application and the time the household is required to provide income/assistance documentation. Because no income we received at the time of application, it is appropriate to not require current documentation.

Q: What do I do if I directly certify a student that was selected for verification?

A: Extend eligibility to all other students on the application, count the direct certification status as a valid response and contact School Nutrition. School Nutrition must know the total number of applications and associated students that were in verification and became directly certified. No additional application must be chosen for verification.

Q: If a household provides agency documentation for SNAP, TANF or FDPIR benefits must they also provide the completed household members form?

A: No, because someone in the household is eligible for the above assistance programs, household size and income is not required. Recommend reviewing household information to ensure credibility prior to approving.

Q: If a household responds to verification after 11/15 must the complete a new application?

A: Yes, the household must submit proof of income and complete a new application per page 59 of the [Eligibility Manual](#).

Q: A household provides documentation that their self-employed business is operating at a loss, but they consistently are paying themselves a monthly salary from the business. Do you count the

income as zero because the business is operating at a loss, or do you count the consistent monthly payments from the business as income?

A: The consistent monthly income must be counted as regularly received income. The business could be operating at a loss, however the household is receiving an income from this business and therefore this income should be counted. In cases of self-employment the household also has the option to use the prior year's tax return if this is a more accurate depiction of their income.

Miscellaneous

Q: Do we need to keep a copy of the denied letter?

A: Either keep a copy of the letter or document the date it was sent.

Q: What if a family moves in from out of state and has a SNAP number from out of state?

A: The out of state SNAP number can be accepted but the case number needs to be confirmed of validity. You can contact the out of state agency directly or contact the School Nutrition Unit for assistance.

Q: Where can we find resources for foreign language translation?

A: Work with your school district to see if there are any resources available for this service.

Translation services are an allowable expense for food service funds. Or visit

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/translated-applications>.

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