Eligibility Manual for School Meals

Updates – School Year 2017-2018

COLORADO
Department of Education

Overview

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) School Year *2017-2018 Eligibility Manual for School Meals* was released on June 29, 2017. This manual provides guidance to state agencies and school food authorities (SFAs) in determining and verifying meal eligibility.

The updated manual contains several changes or clarifications to policies and processes from previous versions. The pertinent updates are listed below.

Annual Income Reporting

It is now permissible to include an *annual income frequency* on applications in the "Earnings from Work" category. If a household provides annual income on an application, supporting documentation is *no longer required*. For more information, see: SP 19-2017: Reporting Annual Income on School Meal Applications (pg. 25).

Carryover

School officials are encouraged to send carryover expiration reminders to families via email, text message, auto-dialed calls, or mailed notices. **The reminders may not contain a notice of adverse action, as this would confer the right to appeal.** The reminder could also include the cost of reduced price and paid meals and a copy of the SFA's written meal charge policy. For more information on preventing unpaid meal charges, see: SP 29-2017: 2017 Edition: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools (pg. 55).

Additional Benefits

If the SFA chooses to provide additional benefits (e.g., free school books, computers, or exam fee waivers) for children eligible for free and reduced price meals, the SFA must obtain informed consent from the household. For more information, see: SP 50-2011, CACFP 27-2011, SFSP 20-2011: Free and Reduced Price Meal Applications – Requests for Additional Information (pg. 76).

Additional Requirements for all Free and Reduced Price School Meal Applications

- The application must convey to the applicant in a clear and easy to understand instruction that any income field left blank is a positive indication of no income and certifies that there is no income to report (pg. 79).
  - *On a web-based application, it is recommended that incomplete responses to an income field or any other required field prevent the applicant from progressing or making a submission. In these cases, it is also recommended to include error or warning messages that indicate what information is missing.*
- Total Household Members Reporting Field: Paper applications must include a field for reporting the total number of members present in the household. A web-based application may accomplish this by requiring household confirmation of a total computed by the application (pg. 79).

- Placement of Social Security Number Reporting Field: The structure of the applications must ensure only those households applying on the basis of income are requested to provide the last four digits of an adult household member's Social Security Number (or indicate a lack thereof) (pg. 79).

Verification

When an application is selected for verification and, prior to hearing back from the household in question, that household is found on a direct certification list, *the application does not have to be replaced in the verification sample pool*. The application would be marked as a direct certification in the appropriate box in Section 3 of the FNS-742. LEAs should include these applications in Field 5-5 (Number of applications selected for verification) of the FNS-742 and indicate the number of these applications that are being converted to direct certification in the remarks portion of the FNS-742 (pg. 105).

Where can I learn more?

- 2017 Eligibility Manual for School Meals:
  https://www.cde.state.co.us/nutrition/freeandreducedpricemealseligibilitymanual
- CDE, Office of School Nutrition Free and Reduced Webpage:
  https://www.cde.state.co.us/nutrition/nutrfreeandreducedmaterials.htm

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