

Guidance for Notifying Parents of a Child's Eligibility for Free or Reduced-price Meals

This document highlights important guidance for local educational agencies (LEAs) when notifying parents of free or reduced-price benefits for meals and milk in the U. S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) school nutrition programs, including the [National School Lunch Program \(NSLP\)](#), [School Breakfast Program \(SBP\)](#), [Special Milk Program \(SMP\)](#), [Afterschool Snack Program \(ASP\)](#) of the NSLP, and [Seamless Summer Option \(SSO\)](#) of the NSLP. This information is available in the USDA's publication, *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*.

Application Certification

- **Notification at the beginning of the year**
LEAs must distribute information letters either by **postal service** or **e-mail** (to the parent or guardian) or include in the **information packets** provided to the students.
- **Notifications throughout the year**
Households enrolling new students in a LEA after the start of the school year must be provided an information letter, application form, and materials **when they enroll**. The status of any newly enrolled child must also be checked for participation in an Assistance Program (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Family Assistance (TFA)) and in Other Source Categorical Eligibility (e.g., foster children, Head Start, homeless children, and runaway children) **at the time of enrollment**.
- **Notification and direct certification**
Notification of a child's eligibility through direct certification may be done through **e-mail** if the LEA has an e-mail address for a parent or guardian.



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- **Notification and the carryover period**

When no new application is submitted and eligibility is not established through direct certification by the end of the 30-day carryover period, eligibility for free or reduced-price meals/milk **expires and the LEA must discontinue benefits for these children.** The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) *encourages* the school or LEA to provide households with a **reminder notice** that their free or reduced-price meal benefits will end on a specified date if the household does not submit a new application or the school has not received notice that the child is eligible through Assistance Programs or is Other Source Categorical Eligibility. The reminder notice also could include the cost of paid meals/milk.

If a child's eligibility expires at the end of the 30-day carryover period, the LEA **cannot send a notice of denial or notice of adverse action.** Both the notice of denial and notice of adverse action provide the opportunity to appeal. Because no eligibility determination was made during the current school year, there is no right to appeal a discontinuation of benefits due to the expiration of the carryover period.

- **Notification of application approval**

Households must be notified, either in **writing or verbally**, of their eligibility status as approved for free or reduced-price benefits. The LEA may **e-mail** the notification of the household's approval for meal benefits to the adult household member who signed the application.

- **Notification of denied applications**

If a household provides an incomplete application or does not meet the eligibility criteria for free or reduced-price benefits, the application must be denied. LEAs must provide **written notification of the denial** to households with children who are denied benefits. The written notification of denial can be provided by **mail or e-mail** to the adult household member who signed the application. *The "notification" page of an online system does not meet this requirement. LEAs that use automated telephone information systems must also give written notification of denial.*

- **Notification of adverse action (not part of the 30-day carryover period)**

All currently certified households for whom benefits are to be reduced or terminated must be given 10 calendar days' **written notice** of the change prior to the date the change will go into effect. The first day of the advance notice period is the day the notice is sent. The notice of adverse action may be sent via the **postal service or to the e-mail address** of the parent or guardian. *The LEA cannot notify the household of adverse action by phone only.*

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Verification

- **Notification of verification**

When a household is selected for verification, the LEA must provide the household with a **letter or an e-mail** if the parent or guardian contact information is known, informing a household of its selection and must provide a list of the documents or other forms of evidence the household must submit to the LEA.

- **Notification of collateral contacts**

If a collateral contact is used to verify a household, all collateral contacts may be **written or oral** and must be documented, dated, and initialed. In collateral contact situations, no contact may be made without first notifying the household and obtaining its permission.

- **Second notification of verification**

The LEA must make at least one attempt to contact the household when the household does not adequately respond to the request for verification. The required follow-up attempt may be in **writing** (including to the parent or guardian's e-mail address) or by **telephone or text message**.

- **Notification of adverse action**

All currently certified households for whom benefits are to be reduced or terminated must be given 10 calendar days' **written notice** of the change prior to the date the change will go into effect. The first day of the advance notice period is the day the notice is sent. The notice of adverse action may be sent via the **postal service or to the e-mail address** of the parent or guardian. *The LEA cannot notify the household of adverse action only by phone.*

Resources

Direct Certification for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage)

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Direct-Certification>

Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Milk in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Eligibility-for-Free-and-Reduced-price-Meals-and-Milk-in-School-Nutrition-Programs/Documents>

Eligibility Manual for School Meals (USDA): [https://portal.ct.gov/-](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Forms/FreeRed/USDA_eligibility_manual.pdf)

[/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Forms/FreeRed/USDA_eligibility_manual.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Forms/FreeRed/USDA_eligibility_manual.pdf)

Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Nutrition/Verification-Procedures-for-School-Nutrition-Programs>

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For more information, review the USDA's publication, *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*, and visit the CSDE's [Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Milk in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage, or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841.

This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Forms/FreeRed/Guidance_Notifying_Parents_Child_Eligibility_Free_Reduced_Meals.pdf.

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To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#), (AD-3027) found online at: [How to File a Complaint](#), and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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Inquiries regarding the Connecticut State Department of Education's nondiscrimination policies should be directed to: Levy Gillespie, Equal Employment Opportunity Director/Americans with Disabilities Coordinator (ADA), Connecticut State Department of Education, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 505, Hartford, CT 06103, 860-807-2071, levy.gillespie@ct.gov.