

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) for notifying parents of benefits for free or reduced-price meals and free milk in the U. S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) school nutrition programs. The school nutrition programs include 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 [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#).

Application Certification

- **Notification at the beginning of the year**
LEAs must distribute information letters either by **postal service** or **email** (to the parent or guardian) or include in the **information packets** provided to 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**. Additionally, at the time of enrollment, LEAs must have the direct certification contact check the direct certification list to determine if any newly enrolled student is directly certified and automatically eligible for free or reduced-price meals or free milk.
- **Notification and direct certification**
Notification of a child's eligibility through direct certification may be **emailed** if the LEA has an email address for a parent or guardian.
- **Notification and the carryover period**
Under the NSLP, when a new application is not 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 or free milk **expires. The LEA must discontinue benefits for these children.** The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) encourages LEAs to provide households with a **reminder notice** that their free or reduced-price meal benefits will end on a specified date if 1) the household does not submit a new application; or 2) the school has not received notice that the child is eligible through assistance programs or is directly certified through Other Source Categorical Eligibility. The reminder notice also could include the cost of paid meals and 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 for a household to appeal. Parents and guardians do not have the right to appeal a discontinuation of benefits due to the expiration of the

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carryover period because an eligibility determination was not made during the current school year.

- **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 **email** 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 students who are denied benefits. The written notification of denial can be provided by **mail or email** to the adult household member who signed the application. **Note:** 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 whose benefits will 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 through the **postal service or to the email address** of the parent or guardian. The LEA cannot notify the household of adverse action by phone only.

Verification

- **Notification of verification**

When a household is selected for verification, the LEA must provide the household with a **letter or email** if the parent or guardian contact information is known, informing the 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, contact cannot 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

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does not adequately respond to the request for verification. The required follow-up attempt may be in **writing** (including an email to the parent or guardian) or by **telephone or text message**.

- **Notification of adverse action**

All currently certified households whose benefits will 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 through the **postal service or to the email 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](https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/direct-certification) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/direct-certification>

[Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs](https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs>

[Eligibility Manual for School Meals](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/usda_eligibility_manual.pdf) (USDA):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/usda_eligibility_manual.pdf

[Verification Procedures for School Nutrition Programs](https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/verification-procedures-for-school-nutrition-programs) (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/verification-procedures-for-school-nutrition-programs>

For more information, visit the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Milk in School Nutrition Programs](https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslpforms/freered/guidance/notifying_parents_child_eligibility_free_reduced_meals.pdf.

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To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted 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; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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