

Processing Applications for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in the School Nutrition Programs

This document highlights important reminders for local educational agencies (LEAs) when processing free and reduced-price applications for free and 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 publication, *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*.

1. LEAs cannot request households to complete separate family applications for each school.
2. The Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) *Parent/Guardian Letter: Frequently Asked Questions about Free and Reduced-price School Meals* must accompany the application form and instruction. This letter is available in the "[Family Application](#)" section of the CSDE's [Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage. For more information, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Guidance for Notifying Parents of a Child's Free or Reduced-price Eligibility*.
3. Eligibility determinations are valid for the entire school year unless the LEA discovers that the application was determined incorrectly, or the status changes due to verification.
4. Residential child care institutions (RCCIs) must refer to the free and reduced-price application materials if day clients are served *and* claimed for free or reduced-price meal reimbursement.
5. If a student is determined to be eligible for free meals or milk because the student is a member of a household receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), or free Medicaid benefits, free eligibility is extended to all students who are members of that household.
6. If a household handwrites a SNAP or TFA number on the application, the determining official must confirm the number before approving the application. This can be done by checking the direct certification list. If the student cannot be confirmed based on the direct certification list, the determining official must contact the adult signer for proof of a SNAP or TFA case number. For guidance, refer to the CSDE's resource, *Procedures*



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for Processing Free and Reduced-price Meal Applications Providing a SNAP/TFA Number.

7. All LEAs must use direct certification. The LEA's direct certification contact person is required to access the CSDE's [Direct Certification Web Application](#) webpage each week. The direct certification list provides the names of students enrolled in the district that are directly certified. If a student's name appears in the database **and** the parent/guardian submits a free and reduced-price meal or free milk application for this student, direct certification takes precedence over the application (unless the student is directly certified as reduced-price based on Medicaid). The student should be recorded as directly certified and automatically eligible for free meals/milk (or reduced-price meals due to Medicaid, if applicable).

All school food authorities (SFAs) are required to notify parents/guardians of their child's direct certification and automatic eligibility for free or reduced-price meal (Medicaid) or free milk benefits. For more information on direct certification and Medicaid, refer to [CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 8-17: Update on the Direct Certification Process and Medicaid](#), and the CSDE's resources, [Important Reminders for Direct Certification with Medicaid](#) and [Steps to Consider When Working with Point-of-service \(POS\) Software Companies](#).

8. A separate household application is not required for foster children because they are considered categorically eligible. There are several ways that LEAs can determine if a foster child is eligible for free meals/milk.
 - The determining official (the person who approves the free and reduced-price meals application) receives a copy of the legal document or legal court order from the foster parent showing that the child is a foster child.
 - The determining official requests and receives from the board of education or school's main office, a copy of the Department of Children and Family Services 603 form for the most current school year, indicating that the student is a foster child.
 - The LEA's foster child point of contact provides the determining official with a list of foster children (for the current school year).
 - The direct certification contact or determining official locates the student's name on the direct certification list.

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- The foster parent completes a free and reduced-price meal application and checks the box indicating that the student is a foster child. A foster child is categorically eligible for free meals or milk and may be included as a member of the foster family if the foster family also chooses to apply for benefits. If the foster family includes the foster child on their application, the foster child's personal use income must be listed on the application and is part of the total household income. A foster family that is not eligible for free or reduced-price meals or free milk benefits does not prevent a foster child from receiving free meal or milk benefits. **Note:** A foster child's free eligibility does **not** automatically extend to all students who are members of a household. For more information regarding foster children and school meals, refer to the USDA's *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*.
9. The free and reduced-price meals or free milk application must inform households that participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) may be eligible for free or reduced-price meals or free milk.
 10. Youth designated as homeless and runaway are categorically eligible for free meals or milk; however, their free status does not extend to other students who are members of the household.
 11. Privatized military housing allowance is excluded from income eligibility determinations.
 12. The SMP must refer to these application materials if free milk is served and claimed. **Note:** The parent/guardian letter for the SMP is different from the parent/guardian letter for school meals. The public media release for the SMP must only contain the **free** income eligibility guidelines.

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Resources

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 8-17: Update on the Direct Certification Process and Medicaid:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Memos/OM2017/OM08-17.pdf>

Direct Certification Web Application (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-Free-Milk-in-School-Nutrition-Programs>

Eligibility Manual for School Meals (USDA):

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

Guidance for Notifying Parents of a Child’s Free and Reduced-price Eligibility (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Forms/FreeRed/Guidance_Notifying_Parents_Child_Eligibility_Free_Reduced_Meals.pdf

Important Reminders for Direct Certification with Medicaid (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/DirectCert/Important_Points_Direct_Certification_Medicaid.pdf

Procedures for Processing Free and Reduced-price Meal Applications Providing a SNAP/TFA Number (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Forms/FreeRed/Processing_Free_Reduced_Meal_Applications_Providing_SNAP_TFA_Number.pdf

Steps to Consider When Working with Point-of-service (POS) Software Companies (CSDE):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/DirectCert/Direct_Certification_Medicaid_Steps_POS_Software.pdf

Training Program: Determining Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk (“Related Resources” section of CSDE’s Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

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

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For more information, refer to the USDA's *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](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This form is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Nutrition/NSLP/Forms/FreeRed/Processing_Free_Reduced_Applications_SNP.pdf.

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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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