

FOOD AND NUTRITION PROCEDURES

Miami-Dade County Public Schools



Subject: **PROCEDURES FOR DETERMINING THE ELIGIBILITY OF STUDENTS TO RECEIVE FREE OR REDUCED PRICE MEALS**

School Food Service is defined as total food and beverages served to students during school hours on school grounds.

FEDERAL REGULATIONS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has established regulations to carry out the intent of Congress that nutritious meals must be available to every school student regardless of the household's ability to pay. This procedure sets forth guidelines for school officials responsible for determining eligibility for free and reduced price meals in schools that participate in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.

Requirement for a Single Application per Household

Section 105(C) of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 states, "A State educational agency or local educational agency may not request a separate application for each child in the household that attends schools under the same local educational agency." **This means that even if children from one household attend different schools within a district, only one application may be requested.** This provision has been in effect since the 2005-2006 school year.

SCHOOL BOARD POLICY

School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida, Policy 8531 – Free and Reduced Price Meals. The Board shall provide free or reduced-price meals to all eligible students in accordance with the National School Lunch Act, 42 U.S.C. 1751 et. Seq. The schools shall annually notify all families of the availability, eligibility requirements, and application procedure for free and reduced-price meals by distributing an application to the family of each student enrolled in the school, and shall provide free or reduced-price meals at school upon request to eligible students, except in instances where the board has elected to offer free lunches and breakfasts to all students attending participating schools designated by the District, in accordance with the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

CENTRALIZED APPROVAL SYSTEM

In order to process family meal applications, a centralized approval system is in place. Applications for Free and Reduced Price Meals ([Attachment A](#)) are collected at the school, reviewed for completeness, accuracy and legibility and forwarded to the Department of Food and Nutrition for further processing.

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AUTHORIZATION

For a student to be eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits, the student must:

1. Submit a complete application including Income or SNAP / TANF / FDPIR information

OR

2. Be Directly Certified, Migrant/Homeless/Foster/Head Start Certified or Runaway Youth.

Students that are approved as directly certified/migrant/homeless/foster/head start certified or runaway youth are automatically granted **eligibility for free meal benefits**. Students that are directly certified through Medicaid are certified for free or reduced price lunch.

In addition, the USDA states that all children in a household are eligible to receive free or reduced meals based on the Direct Certification or SNAP/TANF/FDPIR status of any of their household members.

Direct Certification – Prior to the opening of school, Information Technology Services (ITS) will match students with electronic information received from the Department of Children and Families via the Department of Education who are members of a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) household, receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or receive benefits from the Federal Distribution Program on Indian Reservation (FDPIR). Students matched are automatically approved for free meals and will not require an application. Direct Certification includes Medicaid eligible students. Medicaid certified students may be qualified for free or reduced price meals and are qualified based on the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Free students do not exceed 130% of the FPL and reduced price students do not exceed 185% of the FPL.

After the match, a list is generated by ITS with the names of Students Directly Certified For Free or Reduced Price Meals ([Attachment B](#)). It is electronically delivered to the schools. This list is scheduled to be run monthly in order to update students who have been recently Directly Certified. In addition, Direct Certification Eligibility Notification Letters ([Attachment C](#)) are generated by ITS and electronically delivered to the schools and should be sent home with the students.

Eligibility for free or reduced price meals is extended to all children in a household if one member has been directly certified.

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Migrant Certification – Prior to the opening of schools and weekly thereafter, ITS will generate a list of students who are migrant certified. These students are eligible for free meal benefits and do not require an application. The list will be electronically sent to schools having migrant certified students and should be kept on file. If the student is not on the list, schools must confirm migrant certification by either viewing information in ISIS or contacting the Migrant Office at 305-258-4115 (document confirmation status in ‘School Use Only’ section) prior to forwarding the application to the Department of Food and Nutrition. **If all students on the application are not confirmed as Migrant Certified, income or SNAP/TANF/FDPIR information is required.**

Homeless Certification – Prior to the opening of schools and weekly thereafter, ITS will generate a list of students who are homeless certified. These students are eligible for free meal benefits and do not require an application. The list will be electronically sent to schools having homeless certified students and should be kept on file. If the student is not on the list, schools must confirm homeless certification by either viewing information in ISIS or contacting the Homeless Office at 305-995-7318 (document confirmation status in ‘School Use Only’ section) prior to forwarding the application to the Department of Food and Nutrition. **If all students on the application are not confirmed as Homeless Certified, income or SNAP/TANF/FDPIR information is required.**

Head Start Children - Prior to the opening of schools and weekly thereafter, ITS will generate a list of students who are head start certified. These students are eligible for free meal benefits and do not require an application. The list will be electronically sent to schools having head start certified students and should be kept on file. **If all students on the application are not confirmed as Head Start Certified, income or SNAP/TANF/FDPIR information is required.**

Foster Children – Prior to the opening of schools, foster children will be identified through information provided by the Department of Children and Families. Students identified are automatically approved for free meals regardless of the child’s personal use income or the income of the household. Foster children do not require an application. A list will be generated by ITS with names of Students Foster Certified For Free Meals. It will be electronically sent to the schools and must be kept on file. This list is scheduled to be run monthly in order to update students who have been recently identified as foster children. **If all students on the application are not confirmed as Foster Certified, income or SNAP/TANF/FDPIR information is required.**

Staff at the Department of Food and Nutrition shall manually input foster student information (categorical code “C”), as needed.

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Runaway Youth – Principals have the authority to complete a meal application for Runaway Youths and have it processed as an Administrative Approval.

STATUS FROM PREVIOUS SCHOOL YEAR

- Until the application for the current school year has been processed, free and reduced price meals may be served to students who were granted automatic eligibility or who have approved applications on file from the previous school year until the fall grace period ends.
- Previously approved students who transfer from one Miami-Dade County Public School to another maintain their eligibility through the fall grace period.
- Siblings of returning students may receive meal benefits based on the returning students' previous year's eligibility through the end of the fall grace period. A copy of the ISIS "Miscellaneous Screen" should be given to the Food Service Manager by front office personnel. Eligibility status will be manually updated daily, to the extent feasible, until the current year's meal application is processed.

All others, including new students to the district such as Pre-Kindergarten (PK) students and students applying for the first time will have a paid meal eligibility until they have an approved application on file that determines their eligibility.

The week **prior to the opening of school**, a computer generated authorization list of students who are free or reduced directly certified, migrant/homeless/foster/head start certified for the entire school year will be sent to each school principal. The list will also include students eligible for benefits through **the end of the fall grace period**.

GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING FAMILY APPLICATIONS

- A. The official Miami-Dade County Public Schools application for the current school year must be used.
- B. **The application should be completed in black or dark blue ink using capital letters.**
- C. **The application must not contain white-out.**
- D. Only **one** application is required to be submitted for each household listing all Miami-Dade County Public School students in the "Student Information" section.

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- E. Each student's **birth date** is required on the application. The student's **identification number** is also needed to ensure expeditious and accurate processing.
- F. An additional application must be completed if the number of students or family members exceeds the lines provided. Paperclip the two applications together when submitting. **DO NOT STAPLE.**
- G. All applications must be signed by a parent or guardian.
- H. Negative Benefit Changes
 1. Prior to mass denial (at the end of fall grace period), negative meal status changes (free to reduced price, free or reduced price to paid) will be held in suspension until the first operating day of the following week.
 2. If an application is incorrectly processed and the correction will result in a negative benefit change, a grace period of a minimum of 10 or a maximum of 16 calendar days shall be given (depending on the day of the week the change is made).
 3. If a subsequent application submitted would result in a negative benefit change, the household is contacted to advise of possible negative benefit change. Written consent must be received from the parent/guardian in order for it to be implemented. If the parent/guardian does not consent to the negative benefit change, the subsequent application is not processed and the current eligibility remains in effect.
- I. Households may apply for free/reduced price meals any time during the year. **Once a student is approved, benefits are effective for the entire school year including applications submitted with zero (0) income.**
- J. Information on the application is confidential and must be treated as such.
- K. Schools are able to "view only" eligibility information in ISIS.

SCHOOL SITE RESPONSIBILITIES

The school principal or administrative designee is responsible for administering the collection and review of the family applications. All applications **MUST** be thoroughly checked for accuracy and completeness by a school designee prior to forwarding to the Department of Food and

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Nutrition. The school designee may be any clerical staff member assigned by the principal who is trained on the family meal application processing procedures. **All incomplete applications will be returned to the school for corrective action. This will delay the student from receiving meal benefits.**

School site responsibilities include:

- A. Applications are available at the front office in English, Spanish, and Creole.
- B. Encourage students to return completed meal application forms after July 1st and throughout the grace period.
- C. All applications are to be reviewed by the school designee for accuracy and completeness. **Incomplete applications must not be forwarded to the Department of Food and Nutrition.** If an application is incomplete or contains questionable information, the household must be contacted by phone or in writing to obtain the correct information. If the application is missing the signature of an adult household member, the application must be returned to the household or the adult household member may come to the school and sign the Free and Reduced Price Meal Application.
- D. Applications for new or returning students without an approved application on file shall be reviewed and forwarded immediately to the Department of Food and Nutrition. All other applications shall be reviewed and forwarded to the Department of Food and Nutrition expeditiously.
- E. Status of Application letters ([Attachment D](#)) generated by ITS must be sent home with the students.

REVIEW OF APPLICATIONS FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEALS

The school designee **must** review each application to ensure that the household has completed all applicable information as detailed below:

A. **CATEGORICAL APPLICATIONS**

Applications providing SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) or a FDPIR (Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservation) case number require:

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1. Student information: names of all students, **birth dates**, **student identification numbers**, grades and their respective school names.
2. SNAP, TANF or FDPIR case number of any eligible household member. The case number is a 10-digit number that can be found on the approval letter from the agency. **This is not the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card number.**
3. Signature of an adult household member certifying this information is correct.

B. INCOME APPLICATIONS

All other households must complete applications with the following information:

1. Student Information: names of all students, **birth dates**, **student identification numbers**, grades, their respective school names, and the student's income (whole dollars only) and pay frequencies.
2. Names of all other household members, including the individual who signed the application.
3. If there are foster or head start children in the household, include them in either the student or household member section, whichever is applicable. The foster child box in the student section should be checked accordingly.
4. Amount of **income and pay frequencies** in every column listed under appropriate source for all household members.
 - a. A blank no income box does indicate "no income". A '0' can also be entered for no income.
 - b. All gross income earned by other family members must be provided in the respective columns. **Pay frequencies must be indicated:**
 - W = Weekly
 - 2W = Every two weeks
 - M = Monthly
 - 2M = Twice a month



NOTE: A pay frequency must be indicated for every income listed, otherwise the application is incomplete and CANNOT be processed. If a pay frequency

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is not indicated for each income, the school official must obtain this information from the household prior to forwarding the application to the Department of Food and Nutrition.

5. Total number of household members should agree with number of members listed in sections 1 and 3.
6. Last four (4) digits of the Social Security Number of adult signing the application. An **X** should be entered in the “No SSN” box if they do not have one.
7. Signature of an adult household member certifying that the information provided is correct.

C. ADMINISTRATIVE APPROVALS

Principals have the authority to fill out a meal application for a student known to be economically needy anytime during the year if the household fails to apply. This option is intended for use in an individual situation only, and it does not apply to groups of children. It should be used when repeated efforts to obtain a completed application have not been successful. An explanation is to be written and attached to the application (use a paper clip - DO NOT STAPLE) to show how the principal determined economic need of the family and that all attempts to obtain an application from the student’s household have failed.

The application requires:

1. Student information: student name, **birth date**, **student identification number**, grade, and school name.
2. Student(s) income: Any income for all students. If the student(s) does not have income leave blank or write a ‘0’.
3. Household members: known names, incomes and pay frequencies. If no income leave blank or write ‘0’.
4. Place an **X** in the “R” box of the “Administrative Approval” section if the student is a Runaway Youth or an **X** in the “O” box for all other administrative approvals.
5. The source of information is to be documented in the “Administrative Approval” space provided as well as the attempts made to contact the household.
6. Principal must sign the “Signature Required” box of section 4.



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Administrative approvals are not intended to be used for the sole purpose of eliminating negative student account balances.

NOTIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY

- A. Notify parents of the eligibility determination of the application by sending home the Status of Application letter generated by ITS. On the first day of each week after school starts, ITS will issue Status of Application letters for each free/reduced price/denied meal authorization from ISIS entries of the previous week, including transfers from other Miami-Dade County Public Schools.
- B. Staff of the Meal Benefits Department will notify parents of potential decrease in meal benefits. This does not apply to Verification students.

IMMEDIATE PROCESSING

On a limited basis upon the school's determination of an urgent need, immediate processing is available by contacting the Department of Food and Nutrition. The eligibility determination will become effective the following day in ISIS and in the POS Cash Register System. This option is intended for limited use in **individual** situations and **must not** be used to make eligibility determinations for categories or groups of students.

FAIR HEARING

A household may appeal either the denial of benefits or the level of benefits for which they are approved.

A. Informal Discussion

If parents or guardians are dissatisfied with the District's decision regarding their meal application, they may request an informal discussion with staff at the District Office. This discussion provides an opportunity to:

- Discuss the application
- Present additional information
- Obtain an explanation of data submitted on the application



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Discussions shall not in any way prejudice or diminish the family's right to a fair hearing. Parents are to be notified during the discussion of their right to make an appeal to the Director of Operations, if desired.

B. Formal Appeal

A family may initiate a formal appeal to the Director of Operations subsequent to the informal discussion. The Director of Operations will notify the family of a convenient time and place for the appeal meeting. At this appeal, the family will have an opportunity to present evidence and arguments supporting its position. The decision of the Director of Operations shall be based on the evidence presented and other existing documentation. A summary of the meeting and pertinent documents shall be kept on file for a period of three (3) years and are to be made available to the family during this period.

NONDISCRIMINATION

The letters, application and forms described in this procedure have been developed following Civil Rights requirements and must be used in the administration of the food service program in each school. A nondiscrimination poster developed by the USDA must be placed in a prominent place in each cafeteria and must remain there all year.

A brief summary of Civil Rights requirements:

1. There must not be any form of discrimination against, physical segregation of, or overt identification of any student with regard to his/her inability to pay the full price of a meal.
2. The names of students eligible to receive free or reduced price meals shall not be published, posted, or announced in any manner, except for confidential record keeping.

PAYMENT FOR MEALS

- A. Full Price and Reduced Price students at non-CEP Miami-Dade County Public Schools do not pay for their meals as they are under universal free breakfast and lunch.
- B. Parent Account Management System (PAMS) is an online pre-payment system which is available to all parents as cash is not accepted.



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ACCOUNTING FOR MEALS

- A. Student identification numbers will be used as meal identification numbers.
- B. Each student's meal eligibility is programmed into the account number. Students in all grades should be encouraged to enter their student ID numbers onto the keypad although cashiers may do it for students in grades PK-2 at the beginning of each school year. In special situations an adult designee may assist the student in entering his/her number. A verbal identifier is also required, so the student's name must be stated by either a M-DCPS staff member or by the student.

When the student ID number is entered onto the keypad, the student's name, eligibility, and/or prepaid information appears on the display screen of the cash register. The price of ALC item is deducted from the student's prepaid balance. An audible signal is heard if that account number has been previously entered that day.

- C. Student Rosters/Balance Reports are run from the computer in the food service office. The Balance Reports indicate student meal eligibility (free, reduced price, paid) and student account numbers.

The report format should be:

- Elementary - Alphabetical by home room
- Secondary - Alphabetical by student last name

Balance Reports (by homeroom teacher) will be run by the food service manager in all elementary schools. The reports will be provided to teachers to assist the students in memorizing their meal identification numbers. The food service manager uses the Balance Report to confirm a student's meal identification number.

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- D. Special events that impact the school food service operation must be pre-approved by the Department of Food and Nutrition, and forwarded to the Department of Agriculture (DOA). Events such as these must be planned in a way to ensure that ALL students are offered a school food service meal and that students approved for free or reduced price meals are not overtly identified.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Meals or any component thereof may not be withheld as disciplinary action, except during the term of an outdoor suspension.

Students who fraudulently sell or use meal privileges may be subject to prosecution under Section 245.12 of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program regulations. Please consider this when disciplining students for such actions.

FORMS

Prior to the opening of school, Free and Reduced Price Meal Applications (English, Spanish and Creole) will be delivered to each school. Only the current may be used.

DEFINITIONS

Administrative Approval – The principal has the authority to complete an application for a student known to be economically needy if the household fails to apply. This type of approval also applies to a runaway youth.

Administrative Designee - A school administrator whom the principal has chosen to monitor the economically needy procedures.

Adopted Child - An adopted child for whom a household has accepted legal responsibility is considered to be a member of that household. Therefore, the household's size and total income is considered in the eligibility determination.

Adult - Member of household 21 years of age or older.

Categorical Eligibility - Children who are currently receiving SNAP, TANF or FDPIR benefits, or who are certified as migrant, homeless, foster, or head start.

Child Living with One Parent, Relatives, or Friends - In cases where no specific welfare agency or court is legally responsible for the child, or where the child is living with one parent, other

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relatives, or friends of the family, the child is considered to be a member of the household with whom he/she resides, and the size and total income of that household is used to determine the child's eligibility.

Current Income - Income before deductions for income taxes, employee's social security taxes, insurance premiums, bonds, etc. It includes the following: (1) monetary compensation for services, including wages, salary, commissions, and/or fees; (2) net income from non-farm self-employment; (3) net income from farm self-employment; (4) social security; (5) dividends on savings or bonds, income from estates or trusts, or rental income; (6) public assistance or welfare payments; (7) unemployment compensation; (8) government civilian employee or military retirement, pensions, or veteran's payments; (9) private pensions or annuities; (10) alimony or child support payments; (11) regular contributions from persons not living in the household; (12) net royalties; (13) other cash income, which would include cash amounts received or withdrawn from any source including savings, investments, trust accounts, and other resources, which would be available to pay the price of a child's meal. Income does not include money received by volunteers for services performed under the National Older Americans Volunteer Program.

NOTE: Net income from non-farm self-employment is net money income (gross receipts minus expenses) from one's own business, professional enterprise, or partnership. Gross receipts include the value of all goods sold and services rendered. Expenses include cost of goods purchased, rent, heat, light, power, depreciation charges, wages and salaries paid, business taxes (not personal income taxes), etc. The value of saleable merchandise consumed by the proprietors of retail stores is not included as part of net income.

Net income from farm self-employment is money income (gross receipts minus operating expenses) from the operation of a farm by a person on his own account, as an owner, renter or sharecropper. Gross receipts include the value of all products sold, government crop loans, money received from the rental of farm equipment to others, and incidental receipts from the sale of wood, sand, gravel, etc. Operating expenses include the cost of feed, fertilizer, seed and other farming supplies, cash wages paid to farm hands, depreciation charges, cash paid for rental interest on farm mortgages, farm building repairs, farm taxes (not State and Federal income taxes), etc. The value of fuel, food or other farm products used for family living is not included as part of net income. In general, inventory changes were not considered in determining net income; however, receipts based on income tax returns or other official records do reflect inventory changes.

In both cases, the key words are "gross receipts minus expenses" representing the amount of money available for living expenses.

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Direct Certification for Free Meals - The process by which the school district automatically approves students who are members of a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) household, receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or receive benefits from the Federal Distribution Program on Indian Reservation (FDPIR) or Medicaid. This automatic approval is based on electronic information received from the Department of Children and Families via the Department of Education.

Direct Certification for Reduced Price Meals - The process by which the school district automatically approves students who are members of a Medicaid household. This automatic approval is based on electronic information received from the Department of Children and Families via the Department of Education.

Economic Unit - A group of related or unrelated people who share housing and/or all significant income and expenses of its members.

Emancipated Student - A student living alone or as a separate economic unit is considered for eligibility purposes as a family of one.

Fall Grace Period – Time period at the beginning of each school year when the students may use their previous year’s meal eligibility (free or reduced) until the application for the current year is processed.

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservation (FDPIR) – Low-income American Indian and non-Indian households that reside on a reservation that contain at least one person who is a member of a Federally-recognized tribe, are eligible to participate in FDPIR. FDPIR is an alternative to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, because they do not have easy access to food stamp offices or authorized food stores.

Foreign Exchange Student - A foreign exchange student is considered a member of the household in which he/she resides. Therefore, the household size and total household income are considered in the eligibility determination.

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Foster Child - A foster child is a child who is living in a household, but who remains the legal responsibility of the welfare agency or court. A foster child is eligible for free meal benefits regardless of their personal income or the income of the household, and no application is needed.

Foster Child Income - The foster child's income includes funds provided by the welfare agency that are specifically identified by category for the personal use of the child, such as for clothing, school fees, and allowances and other funds received by the child, including any income the child earns for full-time or regular part-time employment, and money provided by the child's family for personal use.

Free Meal - A meal served under the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program to a child from a household eligible for such benefits under 7 CFR Part 245 and for which neither the child nor any member of the household pays.

Head Start Certified – Pre-Kindergarten students from low income families that are in a federal program. These students are eligible for free meal benefits and no application is needed.

Homeless Certified – Students who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence and have been certified by Miami-Dade County Public Schools Homeless Office. These students are served by programs under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. These students are eligible for free meal benefits and no application is needed.

Household or Family - A group of related or unrelated individuals who are not residents of an institution or boarding house, but who are living as one economic unit.

Income Eligibility - Households that do not claim categorical eligibility must provide household size and income information to enable school officials to make comparisons against the Income Eligibility Guidelines. If the total reported income for the household size is within the eligibility limits, the child is eligible for either free or reduced price benefits as applicable.

Mass Denial – Termination of students' previous year's meal eligibilities at the end of the fall grace period.

Migrant Certified – Children of farm workers who have not remained in the district for a continuous 36 month period and have been certified by the Miami-Dade County Public Schools Migrant Office. These students are eligible for free meal benefits and no application is needed.

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Military Families - Military personnel serving overseas or assigned to a military base and not living with the household are considered members of the household for purposes of determining eligibility. Only the portion of the deployed service member's income made available to the household should be reported on the application.

Negative Benefit Change - A reduction or termination of meal benefits. Eligibility changes from free to reduced price, free to denied, or reduced price to denied.

Pay Frequency – How often income is received:

- W = Weekly
- 2W = Every two weeks
- M = Monthly
- 2M = Twice a month



Reduced Price Meal - A meal served under the National School Lunch Program or School Breakfast Program to a child from a household eligible for such benefits under 7 CFR Part 245. The price of this meal **must** be less than the full price of the meal and no more than 40 cents per lunch. Neither the child nor any household member can be required to work in the school or in the school's food service to supplement the cost of the meal.

Residential Child - A child who lives in a public or nonprofit institution that operates for the care of children and/or is licensed to do so by the state or local government. A residential child is eligible for free meal benefits since they are included in the foster child category.

Residential Child Income - Payments from any source directly received by the institution on a child's behalf are not considered as income to the child. Only the income a child earns from full-time or regular part-time employment and/or personally receives while in residence at the institution is considered as income.

Runaway Youth- Students who no longer reside in their parental/guardian residence. These students are served by programs under the Runway and Homeless Youth Act.

Student Attending an Institution - A student who attends but does not reside in an institution is considered a member of the household in which he/she resides.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Recipients - Individual(s) currently certified to receive benefits under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

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Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Assistance Unit - Individual(s) currently certified to receive assistance under the TANF Program in a state where the standard of eligibility for TANF benefits does not exceed the income eligibility guidelines for free meal benefits.

Universal Free Breakfast and Lunch Program – The program in which all students are served breakfast and lunch at no charge regardless of the student’s free, reduced-price or paid eligibility category.

For Action By: Principals, Food Service Managers and Satellite Assistants

Refer Questions to: Department of Food and Nutrition

Revised: August 2012, July 2013, July 2015, July 2023

Reviewed: July 2024