

## **CHAPTER 5-DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY, APPLICATIONS, AND VERIFICATION**

Students participating in the School Nutrition Programs are eligible for free, reduced price or paid price meals based on income or categorical eligibility. LEAs will provide applications to the household. If an application is returned to the LEA, staff will review it to determine eligibility for free, reduced price or paid meals. In lieu of an application, students may be eligible for free meals based on direct certification. Only meals served to eligible children can be claimed for reimbursement at the qualifying benefit level of that student.

Each year the USDA issues current Income Eligibility Guidelines used to determine student eligibility for free or reduced-price meals and free milk. The guidelines are issued for the period July 1 to June 30 of the current program year. Only students meeting the income eligible guidelines or students categorically eligible (receive TANF, Food Stamps or FDRP benefits) can receive free or reduced price meals. Other students must pay the designated paid price for school meals.

### **LOCAL EDUCATIONAL AGENCY**

In 2004, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act added the term “local educational agency” (LEA) to identify the entity responsible for the application, certification, and verification activities in the NSLP, SBP, and SMP. In this Chapter, LEA, SFA and school is used interchangeably. School Food Authority (SFA) is used for all other activities conducted in the School Nutrition Programs.

### **APPLICATION PROCESS FOR HOUSEHOLD**

Prior to the school year, the School Nutrition Program will distribute household applications, a sample parent notification letter, and a sample approval letter to LEAs with pricing programs. LEAs should use this information to notify the household about the school's participation in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, After School Snacks and the Special Milk Program.

LEAs should not submit the notification letter and applications to the households before July 1 in an effort to obtain current income information for the school year. SFAs cannot accept the application prior to July 1 of the school year in order to obtain current income or eligibility information. When accepting an application, schools should review the application to ensure that it is complete. LEAs can provide the notification letter and application found in this chapter (pages 15).

During the application process, the school will send out parent notification letters and the applications. All notification to the households should have a no cost telephone number listed. If the telephone number is long distance, schools must provide a toll-free number or accept long distance charges. This allows families to contact the school with questions. Schools can mail out the information, sent in the school enrollment packet or email households.

Late enrollees must be provided the information packet and application when enrolling. If possible, the school should send the student data to the SNP to determine if the student is receiving SNAP.

When a student returns an application, the designated determining official will review information for eligibility. Applications are approved for free or reduced price meals in one of the two ways: (1) income eligibility, in which a determination is based on household size and income; or (2) categorical eligibility, in which children from families receive food stamps, TANF, FDPIR benefits, or the children are identified as homeless, migrant or runaway youth. Homeless and migrant students are required to show supporting documentation of student eligibility validated by a homeless or migrant liaison. To determine income eligibility refer to the table on page 15.

After the LEA reviews the application for completeness, and determines student eligibility, the Notice of Households Approval/Denial or Notice of Direct Certification should be sent to the household notifying the families of free, or reduced price benefits. Once approved for free or reduced price meals, eligibility is good for the entire school year, unless verification efforts indicate that the income reported on the application was not correct, or a family reapplies for increased benefits due to a decrease in income. If the application is denied, due to income or incompleteness of the application, schools must notify the family in writing of their status, and their right to appeal.

### Eligibility Process

LEAs are required to complete the following steps in order to complete the eligibility process.

- Send press release to local media (see Chapter 3)
- Send notice of school participation to the household (see page 15 of this chapter)
- Provide applications and Sharing Information notices
- Review and confirm eligibility using income guidelines or other documentation
- Send notice of households of approval and denial of benefits or Notice of Direct Certification .
- Immediately provide benefits after application approval
- Provide applications throughout the year, when requested.
- Allow families may apply for benefits anytime during the year.
- Categorize student eligibility on the Master List

### Foreign Language Translations

When the school has a significant number of students enrolled whose primary language is not English, the LEA must provide written material and household applications in the other language. A variety of foreign language translations are available upon request to the SNP unit. In addition, LEAs may: allow bilingual personnel to assist with the application process or find other cost-effective means for provide language services. Providing language services may require pooling resources offered by the local community, state agency, or federal agencies.

When a LEA enlists the services of an interpreter, staff, contractor, or volunteer, the LEA must ensure that the interpreter keeps information confidential. See Chapter 3: Civil Rights for further guidance on Limited English Proficiency.

### Students with Prior Benefits

Student who received free or reduced price meals in the prior school year and have not completed an application for the current year are eligible to receive the same prior benefits for the first 30 operating days of the school year (beginning with the first day of school). This

includes direct certification, categorically eligible and income applications. To continue benefits after the first 30 days, an approved application must be on file. Applications received prior to the 30 days deadline supersede the carryover eligibility. If benefits change, it must begin the date a new application is approved. Review the examples for providing meals to students with prior benefits.

**Example 1:** Tom received reduced price meals last year. His family submitted a new application on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of school and it was approved on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Tom is now eligible for free meals based on the family's income. Tom should have received reduced price meals for the first 2 days of school and should be receiving free meals on the third day based on his income eligibility.

**Example 2:** Jenny received free meals last year. For the current year, she received free meals for the first 30 operating days. Jenny has not turned in a new application. On the 31<sup>st</sup> operating day, Jenny is charged full price for her meal.

**Example 3:** Taylor received free meals last year. This year, she turned in an application on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of school. The application is approved for reduced price meals. Taylor will receive free meals for the first 14 days. On the 15<sup>th</sup> day, Taylor will receive meals at the reduced price. Taylor does not receive meals for the first 30 days because the new application information supersedes the prior year.

#### Temporary Income

Schools no longer need to approve zero income applications as temporary due to the year-long approval of applications. School staff should review the income information on the application. If the family is receiving temporary benefits or has zero income, the application is approved for free for the entire year. Exception to the yearlong approval is when an application is selected for verification and the income information indicates that the family was not or is not entitled to free or reduce price meals.

#### Exchange Students

Exchange students are not considered a household of one. It is the sponsoring family's responsibility to pay for meals. However, the sponsoring family may be eligible for free or reduced price meals based on income. The sponsoring family should complete an application for free and reduced price meals and list all family members, the exchange student, and all household income.

#### Nonpricing Schools

Nonpricing schools cannot claim all students for free meals simply because the LEA does not charge for meals. Applications must be provided to the household and direct certification must be conducted with the SA. Students can only be claimed based on the approved eligibility. The application process and direct certification applies.

RCCIs that accept day students that do not live on site are required to complete the application and direct certification processes for those day students only. Residential students are documented on the RCCI Eligibility Documentation Sheet.

#### Exclusion of Housing Allowance for Military Households in Privatized Housing

Housing allowance for military personnel living in privatized housing is permanently excluded from income when determining household eligibility for free and reduced price meals or free milk in all of the child nutrition programs.

“Privatized housing” refers to the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, a program operating at a number of military installations. This initiative puts the operation of military owned housing under private contractors. Under this privatization initiative, a housing allowance appears on the leave and earnings statement of service members living in privatized housing. It is important to note that this income exclusion is only for service members living in housing covered under the Military Housing Privatization Initiative. It is not an allowable exclusion for households living off-base in the general commercial/private real estate market. Additional information about DOD’s Military Housing Privatization Initiative, including a list of affected installations, may be accessed at: <http://www.acq.osd.mil/housing>.

#### Exclusion of Military Combat Pay

Combat pay is defined as an additional payment that is received by the household member who is deployed to a designated combat zone. Combat pay is excluded if it is:

- Received in addition to the service member’s basic pay;
- Received as a result of the service member’s deployment to or service in an area that has been designated as a combat zone; **and**
- Not received by the service member prior to his/her deployment to or service in the designated combat zone.

Combat pay received by service members is normally reflected in the entitlements column of the military Leave and Earning Statement (LES). Information regarding deployment to or service in a combat zone may also be available through military orders or public records on deployment of military units.

When determining income, count the portion of the deployed service member’s income made available to the household. Additionally, deployed service members count as a member of the household and must be listed on the application.

#### **CATEGORICALLY ELIGIBLE**

Categorically eligible children are those who are automatically eligible for free benefits because they receive SNAP, TANF, FDPIR or other qualifying benefits. Schools must obtain an application with current information identifying households as categorically eligible. Households receiving **SNAP, TANF or FDPIR** must complete an application and list a current case number in order to be eligible.

Foster children who are placed in homes by State Agencies or the Courts are categorically eligible for free meals and do not have to complete an application. However, absent of an application, school staff must communicate with the State or local child welfare agency to obtain documentation of child’s status. If staff is unable to obtain documentation, an application must be on file.

**Homeless** children must be determined by the school district’s homeless liaison or by the director a homeless shelter. **Migrant** children is determined by the State or local Migrant

Education Program (MEP) coordinator. A **runaway** child who is receiving assistance from a program under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act and is identified by the local education liaison. Schools can contact the Arkansas Department of Education about the status of homeless and migrant children. All LEAs must have an assigned liaison to coordinate with other agencies in determining the status of homeless, migrant, and runaway students. These children are directly certified when supporting documentation is available.

For additional information and supporting documentation for homeless, migrant and runaway students, contact the following agencies:

- Homeless students: contact the local shelter or homeless organization.
- Migrant student: Arkansas Migrant Education Office, 103 W Park Ave, Bald Knob, AR 72010 or call 501-724-6227
- Runaway Students: Homeless State Coordinator, Office of Federal Program, Arkansas Dept of Education, 4 State Capital Mall, Little Rock, AR 72201-1071, or call 501-682-1059

#### Household of One

Foster children recognized by ARDHS, and children who reside in a residential children care institution are considered a household of one. The household income is not considered, when approving the application for benefits. However, if a student in foster care or an RCCI has steady income, it must be reported on the application for free and reduced price meals to determine eligibility.

When a family member has legal guardianship of a child and the child is not in the legal custody of a welfare agency or the court, applications cannot be approved categorically for free meals. Household members must complete the application and submit income information or a current SNAP/TANF case number.

#### **INDEPENDENT REVIEWS**

LEAs that demonstrate high levels of, or a high risk for administrative error associated with certification and benefit issuance are required to conduct a second review of applications. A second review of applications requires a re-evaluation of the eligibility determination made by the original determining official, based on the information provided by the household on the application.

The second review must determine whether the application is complete, i.e., the application contains the signature of an adult household member, the last four digits of a social security number (or an indication of “none”), names of all household members including the student for whom application is made, income amount (received by each household member identified by the individual who receives it), income source, income frequency or categorical information, if applicable. The second review must also confirm the applications were correctly approved based on current income eligibility guidelines or categorical eligibility information, as applicable, and the master list or roster of student names correctly records the student’s eligibility.

The second review must be conducted by an independent individual or entity that did not make the original eligibility determination. This individual or entity is not required to be an

employee of the LEA but must be trained on how to make application determinations. Individuals or entities who conduct a second review of applications are subject to the disclosure requirements set forth in 7 CFR 245.6, as are all individuals who review initial eligibility applications. Many LEAs have already assigned this responsibility to the confirming official.

The second review of applications must be done before the household is notified of eligibility and must not result in the delay of an eligibility determination. LEAs required to conduct a second review of applications are still required to notify households of the child's eligibility determination within 10 operating days of receiving the application, so the independent review must be conducted timely.

Selected LEAs must conduct a second review of applications annually until the State agency determines that LEA-provided documentation or data obtained during an administrative review demonstrates that no more than 5 percent of reviewed applications required a change in eligibility determinations.

There are two criteria for the selection of LEAs demonstrating a high level of, or at risk for, certification errors:

1. All LEAs with 10 percent or more of certification/benefit issuances in error, as determined by the State agency during an administrative review; and
2. LEAs that the State agency considers at risk for certification error but not selected under Criterion 1. Our state agency will require LEAs with a 5-10 certification/benefit issuance error to conduct independent reviews if they: 1) are new to the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs; 2) have recently hired new administrative staff; or 3) implemented a new electronic system.

LEAs subject to the second review of applications are required to submit to their State agency an annual report, detailing the number of free and reduced price applications subject to a second review, the number and percentage of reviewed applications for which the eligibility determination was changed and a summary of the type of changes that were made. The information reported to the State agency must be as of October 31<sup>st</sup>. This means LEAs will only need to report on applications for the current school year that have been reviewed on or before October 31<sup>st</sup>, a date consistent with already existing reporting requirements.

### **DIRECT CERTIFICATION**

Direct certification is the process of certifying categorically eligible students for free meals without requiring a household application. Direct certification requires coordination with state or federal agencies to identify categorically eligible students. LEAs receiving documentation from the State Agency of categorically eligible students will certify those students for free meals instead of requiring a household application.

Currently, LEAs are required to conduct direct certification for students receiving SNAP benefits. The School Nutrition Programs requires LEAs to provide the state office a list of students. This is required in an Excel format. Once received from by the LEA, SNP will take the information provided and send it to SNAP office to match data with the SNAP

database. Once children are identified receiving SNAP benefits, SNP will provide each school the names of students eligible for free meals. The LEA will maintain the list and provide those students and other children living in the same household free meals for the school year. The siblings of the household should be added to the master list.

In order to identify as many students as possible for free meals, LEAs are required to conduct direct certification a minimum of three times a year. The initial Excel spreadsheet is sent to the SNP office by August 1. This allows the SNAP office enough time to run a match. Thereafter, the school will send data for individual students as they enroll in school. Prior to the first day of school, these names will be updated to the student spreadsheet and routinely matched throughout the year. As new student enroll, the LEA should send new student information to SNP to determine a match. LEAs are required to submit new data at least three times a year, August 1, prior to November 1, and prior to February 1.

Once a student is directly certified, LEAs must update ensure benefits are provided. If a previous application is on file, schools should move that application to the direct certification category. The LEA must send the Notice of Direct Certification to the household. Children directly certified should be placed on file along with the household applications and those names should be placed on the master list. If a child with an application is directly certified prior to the verification process, that application is not subject to verification.

Direct certification does not prevent families from completing household applications. If a student is not on the direct certification list and completes an application indicating the household is receiving SNAP and TANF benefits, the application is approved at face value. It may be that another family member is receiving benefits or the name is different at the state office. Because the name of that student is not on the direct certification list, that application is subject to the verification selection process.

Homeless, migrant, and runaways are considered categorically eligible and can be directly certified if certified by the LEAs liaison and supporting documentation is on file. However, if their names are directly certified for SNAP benefits, they are counted as directly certified and updated on the master list.

Although challenging in private schools, the goal of direct certification is to ensure that all children who are eligible for benefits receives benefits without having to complete an application. Some students will be identified as direct certs after they have already completed an application. These children are still added to the direct certification numbers for statistical reason.

### **COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION (CEP)**

CEP is an alternative to household applications for free and reduced price meals in local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools in high poverty areas. To be eligible, LEAs and/or schools must: meet a minimum level (40%) of identified students for free meals in the year prior to implementing the CEP; agree to serve free lunches **and** breakfasts to all students; not collect free and reduced price applications from households in participating schools; and agree to cover with non-Federal funds any costs of providing free meals to all students above amounts provided in Federal assistance. Reimbursement is based on claiming percentages derived from the identified student percentages.

The *Identified Students* are students certified for free meals through means other than individual household applications; this primarily includes students who are directly certified for free meals on the basis of their participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). It also includes homeless, runaway, Head Start, and migrant youth. It does not include students who are categorically eligible based on submission of a free and reduced price application.

The claiming percentages established for a school in the first year may be used for a period of four school years and may be increased each year if the identified student percentages rise for the LEA and/or school. The percentage of identified students is multiplied by a factor of 1.6 to determine the total percentage of meals reimbursed at the Federal free reimbursement rate (The percentage derived from this calculation must not exceed 100 percent). The remaining percentage of meals, equaling up to 100 percent, is reimbursed at the Federal paid reimbursement rate. Schools apply the claiming percentages to the total number of lunch and the total number of breakfast meals served to determine the number of meals claimed at the free and paid rates.

An LEA may participate in the CEP for all schools in the LEA or only some schools, depending on the eligibility of individual schools and financial considerations based on the anticipated level of Federal reimbursement and other non-Federal support that may be available to cover any meal costs in excess of the Federal reimbursement. Participating schools that continue to meet the minimum direct certification percentage may immediately begin another four-year cycle after the initial cycle concludes. For participating schools falling below the minimum percentage at the end of their four-year cycle, there is the possibility to continue to participate for a “grace year.” A participating LEA or school may stop participating in the CEP during the four-year cycle by notifying the State agency no later than June 30 of the school year prior to when they want to return to normal counting and claiming procedures. This will allow sufficient time for the LEA to prepare for the certification process in the coming school year. Contact the State Agency to determine eligibility.

### **USE OF HOUSEHOLD APPLICATIONS**

A school or LEA gathering income information from all households for purposes other than the School Nutrition Programs cannot use the household applications. If a school meal application is used for non-program use, it cannot be labeled as an application for benefits under the school meals/ or milk program, or give any indication that such benefits are contingent upon a household returning an application. Schools cannot require that a family return an application in order to get benefits under the School Nutrition Programs. Schools cannot use funds from the non-profit school food service account to pay the costs associated with gathering income information not related to school food service.

### **OTHER USES OF INFORMATION FROM THE APPLICATION**

LEAs may only use the information provided by families for determining eligibility for meal or milk benefits and verification of eligibility. LEAs planning to disclose children’s eligibility status for purposes other than determining and verifying free and reduced price eligibility must inform households of this potential disclosure. If the information potential disclosure is not connected with approved government programs or children nutrition programs, LEAs must get parental consent prior to the disclosure. LEAs that plan to disclose information to



Medicaid or the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) must notify households of this disclosure and give households the opportunity to decline the disclosure. This notification is included in the application packet provided to the LEA each year.

For further guidance on the release of household information, refer to USDA guidance *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*, Chapter 7: Confidentiality/Disclosure of Eligibility Information provides instructions regarding what kind of information LEAs may provide and to what agencies or programs. There are specific guidelines for releasing information, the kind of information that can be released and to which agencies. The penalties for improper disclosure of information is a fine of not more than \$1000 or imprisonment of not more than one year, or both for publishing, divulging, disclosing, or making know in any manner or extent not authorized by Federal law, any eligibility information. Be sure to read guidance prior to releasing information.

### **BENEFIT ISSUANCE DOCUMENT (MASTER LIST)**

The benefit issuance document, also **known as the master list**, identifies students eligible for free and reduced price meals. This is the link between the application process and how a meal will be claimed for reimbursement. Schools must keep this document on file and must continually document the status changes of students approved for free and reduced price meals. New students, discharged students, and students changing from reduced to denied, reduced to free, free to reduced or free to denied are documented here.

#### Benefits for Residential Child Care Institutions

RCCIs record student status and income on the ***Free and Reduced Priced Meal Eligibility Documentation Sheet for RCCIs*** . Additional information such intake dates, discharge dates and student income is recorded to identify student status. All information must be complete prior to claiming a student’s meal for reimbursement. Students should be added to the sheet during the intake process. Discharge dates should be updated when children leave the facility.

### **VERIFICATION**

Each year, LEAs must confirm the eligibility of students receiving free and reduced price meals. Depending on the verification method used, LEAs will select a percentage of applications, notify the selected families, and verify the income reported on their applications. LEAs are required to use the standard (error-prone) method. If verification in the prior year resulted in a nonresponse rate less than 20%, the LEA may conduct the alternate methods, random or focused, for the current year. LEAs cannot verify 100% of the application. LEAs must complete the verification process by November 15<sup>th</sup>. **For additional guidance and forms on the verification process, contact the State Agency.**

#### **Agencies that must verify:**

- Schools that claim free, reduce-price and paid meals
- RCCIs who have nonresidential students attending school during the day (only complete process for day students).
- Non-pricing schools who receive free and reduce-price reimbursement (homeless school excluded if all are homeless).

#### Selecting a Method

Prior to selecting a method, schools should review the prior school year's verification non-response rate. The non-response rate is the percentage of households that failed to provide the requested verification information. Example: If two applications are selected for verification and only one responds, the non-response rate is 50%.

If a small school has a 20% non-response rate in the prior school year, the school is required to use the basic method to conduct verification. If the school has a non-response rate is 20% or less, the school may use the random method for verification. Foster children, homeless children and students with a current letter of direct certification on file are not subject to verification.

Regardless of method, schools are required to select a specific percentage of the applications, no more or no less.

### Selecting Three Percent

Whether an LEA is using the Standard method, Alternate One, or Alternate Two method for selecting household applications to verify, schools are required to select only 3%. Below is a guide for selecting three percent of applications when using the basic or the random method.

Number of Applications on File	Number of Applications to Verify
1-33	1
34-66	2
67-100	3
101-133	4

### Standard Method

If a school must use the Standard method, the school must separate the applications that fall within \$100 above or below the allowable monthly income eligibility guidelines, or \$1200 monthly, for free and reduced price meals. The equivalent thresholds for weekly, biweekly, and twice monthly incomes are determined by dividing the annual limit by the number of times per year the income is received. Among these applications, the school must select randomly 3% of the applications to verify. If a school does not have enough error-prone applications to equal 3% of all applications, the school must randomly choose enough of the non-error-prone applications to make up 3%.

#### **Who must use the standard method?**

- All agencies completing the process for the first time (first year in program)
- Agencies that did not complete the process by November 15<sup>th</sup> in the prior school year.
- Agencies that completed the verification process last year, but had a non-response rate of 20% in the prior school year.

Do I need to do the standard process?

Number of applications selected for verification	Number that did not respond as of last Nov. 15	
0 (failed to conduct verification)	0	Must complete standard
1	1	Must complete standard
2	1-2	Must complete standard
3	1-3	Must complete standard
4	1	May use Alternate methods

ARDHS will notify schools required to do the standard method.

#### Alternate-one: Random Method

Only schools that have a less than a 20% non-response rate in the prior school year may select the random method. Schools using this method must determine procedures to randomly select household applications. Example: A school may put names in a hat and draws out 3%. Schools cannot choose applications “for cause” during this process. Verify for cause is not part of the random process.

#### Alternate-two: Focused Method

Under Focused verification, the LEA must verify 1 percent or 1000 of the total number of approved applications. PLUS the lesser of .5 percent or 500 of the total number of applications approved based on categorical eligibility. Children whose families receive benefits from the Food Stamp Program, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or State programs funded through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are categorically eligible for free meals. Students with Direct Certification Letters are exempt from verification.

Under focused sampling, the Sponsor must verify a minimum of:

- a. The lesser of 1% or 1,000 of the total number of approved applications (both income and categorical). The sample selected from income applications with total household income within \$100 monthly or \$1,200 annually of the income eligibility guidelines for free and reduced price meals; **PLUS**
- b. The lesser of .5% (one half of 1%) or 500 of the total number of applications that were approved based on categorical eligibility, selected from applications with a SNAP or TANF number. Always **round up to the next whole number** when determining the correct number of applications necessary for verification.

If a LEA does not have enough applications within the income range of \$100 monthly of the income eligibility guidelines, the school may select additional applications randomly to get the required percentage.

#### Confirmation Review

Schools are required to conduct a confirmation review on all applications selected for verification prior to contacting the household to request income information. This process is to review the accuracy of the approval process and to amend application errors prior to notifying the family. If administrative errors are found, the school should correct the

application prior to contacting the family. The confirming official cannot be the hearing official since the hearing official is the person responsible for reviewing the decisions made by both the determining and the confirming official and for hearing the appeal of the family.

- If the student's eligibility changes because of the confirmation, the school should inform the family of the change in writing.
- If benefits do not change: verify the application.
- If benefits increase, make the increase benefit available to the student immediately, notify the family of the change and then verify the application.
- If the benefits change from free to reduced, LEAs continues with the verification process without change the status until the verification process is complete and necessary.
- If the status changes from free to reduced after the verification process, the Notice of Adverse Action is sent once the verification process is complete.
- If the benefits change from free or reduced price to paid, LEAS must notify families using the **Notice of Adverse Action**, that their benefits will change. The LEA does not verify this application and must select similar application using the same confirmation procedures.

#### Replacing an application

After the confirmation review, LEAs may replace up to 5% of the applications when the LEA believes that the households will not respond satisfactorily to the verification request. When replacing an application, LEAs must use the same verification method. LEAs must conduct a confirmation review on the newly selected applications. When calculating 5%, be sure to round up to the next whole number.

#### Notification: toll free number and follow-ups

All families selected for verification must be notified in writing. Use letter "We Must Check Your Application". Income information must be submitted to the school in order to complete the verification process. The school must provide families with a toll free number in order to contact the school. If a toll-free number is not available, LEAs must allow households to reverse the charges. The phone call should be no-cost to families. In addition, the school must attempt to contact in writing or by phone families who do not respond by the pending deadline and document all attempts. Follow-up attempts may be conducted by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party contractor.

Family notification and responses must be completed each year by November 15. Families who do not respond to the verification process must be given notice that benefit will change to paid within 10 days and hearing procedures must be given. See the verification form *We Have Checked Your Income*. **Families who do not respond to verification must be terminated within the required timeline.**

#### Notice of Adverse Action "We have Checked Your Application"

All households for whom benefits are to be reduced or terminated must be given 10 calendar day's written advance notice of the change. The first day of the advance notice period is the day the notice is sent. The notice must advise the household of the follow: 1) change in benefits; 2) the reasons for the change; that an appeal must be filed within the 10 calendar day advance notice period to ensure continued benefits while awaiting a hearing

and decision; 3) the instructions on how to appeal; 4) that the household may reapply for benefits at any time during the school year; and 5) that SNAP, FDPIR or TANF household may submit an application containing household names and income information and provide written evidence for current household income.

### Benefits During an Appeal

If a household appeals the decision to reduce benefits within the 10 calendar days' timeline, the LEA must continue to provide benefits in which the child was originally approved until a final determination is made. The LEA may continue to claim reimbursement at the level originally approved for during the this time.

Families that do not appeal the decision during the 10 calendar days, or the hearing official rules that benefits must be reduced, the reduction must take place no later than 10 operating days after the 10 calendar day advance notice period, or 10 days after the decision is made by the hearing official.

### Hearing Procedures

The hearing procedures are found in the LEA's free and reduce price policy statement. Be sure to list the name of the hearing official on the notice "We Have Checked Your Application".

### Reapplying for Benefits

Households affected by a reduction o termination of benefits may reapply for benefits at any time during the school year. However, if benefits to a household have been terminated and the household reapplies in the same school year, the household is required to submit income documentation or proof of participation in SNAP, FDPIR or TANF at the time of reapplication. These are not considered new application.

### Tracking Verification

Schools may use the ***Application Verification Summary Report*** on page 20 of this Chapter to track each family selected for the verification process. The summary report allows schools to track household applications according to income, categorical eligibility and verification results. The information can easily be transferred to part II of the LEA Verification Summary Report.

## **DIRECT VERIFICATION**

Prior to contacting a household selected for verification, LEAS may contact government agencies to confirm current income information. If the income information is confirmed by a government agency, the family does not have to contacted. If the agency cannot confirm income, the LEA must notify the family for verification. Information used to verify applications cannot be over 180 days prior to the date of the application.

### **Agencies that may be contacted for verification:**

1. State employment agency- provides wage and benefit.
2. Arkansas Department of Human Services-to confirm name and case number of categorically eligible households receiving SNAP and TANF
3. FDPIR office- to confirm name and case number of categorically eligible households receiving FDPIR

ARDHS is required to provide information for SNAP and TANF. Other agencies are governed by specific rules when releasing public records.

### **LEA VERIFICATION SUMMARY REPORT**

Schools must document the results of the verification process on the ***Local Education Authority Summary Verification Report*** and submit to ARDHS by November 15, each year. Contact DHS for report. Verification of eligibility is not required for children: 1) who have been certified using direct certification system; 2) students in RCCIs, 3) students who are certified as homeless, migrant, or runaway youth.

### **VERIFYING APPLICATIONS FOR CAUSE**

Schools have the right to verify income for cause anytime during the school year as long as it is not part of the regular verification process. Schools have an obligation to verify applications that provide questionable or incorrect information such as household size, income, and categorical eligibility information. However, if a family correctly completed an application resulting in free or reduced price benefits and the family's income changes in the year, the family is not required to report the change. Verifying for cause should be based on substantial information that may indicate that a family is not eligible for free or reduced price meals. For instance, the school may have current income information on file that indicates a student is not entitled to free or reduce price meals, therefore, it may verify an application for cause if the information on the application is different from the information reported to the school.

**INCOME ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES:** USE THE FOLLOWING LINK FOR THE INCOME GUIDELINES USED TO DETERMINE ELIGIBLE FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEAL BENEFITS DURING THE APPLICATION PROCESS.

**[HTTP://WWW.FNS.USDA.GOV/SCHOOL-MEALS/INCOME-ELIGIBILITY-GUIDELINES](http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/income-eligibility-guidelines)**

**FREE AND REDUCED PRICE SCHOOL MEALS APPLICATION, APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS, PARENT LETTERS, AND VERIFICATION FORMS:** USE THE FOLLOWING LINK

**[HTTP://WWW.FNS.USDA.GOV/SCHOOL-MEALS/APPLYING-FREE-AND-REDUCED-PRICE-SCHOOL-MEALS](http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/applying-free-and-reduced-price-school-meals)**

**\*IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE FINDING OR DOWNLOADING AN ONLINE COPY PLEASE CONTACT OUR OFFICE FOR ASSISTANCE.**





## Instructions for Free and Reduced Priced Meal Eligibility Documentation Sheet for RCCIs

### For each student list:

**Name of institutionalized child:** self-explanatory

**Date of Birth:** self-explanatory

**Date entered the program:** List the date the child was enrolled or admitted to the program.

**Date exited:** List the date the child left the program.

**Income earned or directly received by the child:** List only the income a child earns from full-time or regular part-time employment and/or personally receives while in residence at the RCCI as income. Payments from any source directly received by the RCCI on a child's behalf are not considered as income to the child. Infrequent earnings, such as income from occasional baby-sitting or mowing lawns, are not counted as income and should not be listed on the document.

**Dates and periods for which income is received:** For earned income, list dates received.

**Date of eligibility determination:** List the data that the approving official made a determination that the student is eligible for free or reduced price meals.

**Eligibility Category:** Indicate whether the student is eligible for free meals, reduced price meals or paid meals, based on income. Children enrolled as day students or boarding school students must be categorized according to household income and must have a current application or direct certification letter on file.

**Name or initials of determine official:** List the person determining whether a child is eligible for benefits or not must sign this eligibility document at the time of approval.

**Ethnicity:** Indicate whether a child is Hispanic or Latino or if a child is not Hispanic or Latino. Review the household application to determine ethnicity. If an application does not indicate ethnicity, the school may determine ethnicity through visual observation, but cannot change the declaration listed on the application if the family has self-designated.

**Race:** Indicate the race of the child. Review the household application to determine race. If an application does not indicate race, the school may determine race, but cannot change the declaration listed on the application if the family has self-designated.

**Note:** All children will have ethnicity and one or more race declared either by self-declaration (what is listed on application) or what is declared by the school. Race and ethnicity are two different categories. Refer to the Civil Rights Worksheet for definition of race.

**Master List for Schools with Household Applications  
Or Direct Certification Letters on File**

Program Year: \_\_\_\_\_

List the 30th operating day after the first day of school: \_\_\_\_\_

This form lists students eligible to receive Free meals or Reduced Price Meals (**circle one**)  
Schools should use two separate forms, one for children eligible for free meals and a separate form for students eligible for reduced price meals.

<b>1. Students eligible for benefits</b>	<b>2. Prior-year eligibility- mark F, R, or N/A1</b>	<b>3. Date approved for current year</b>	<b>4. Date benefits changed or Ended</b>	<b>5. Change in status Mark F, R, or D1</b>
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				
15.				
16.				
17.				
18.				
19.				
20.				
21.				
22.				
23.				
24.				

1 Prior-year eligibility: F= Eligible for free meals R= Eligible for reduced price meals D=Denied benefits

2 Ethnicity: Mark H for Hispanic or Latino Mark N for Not Hispanic or Latino

3 Race(refer to Civil Rights Worksheet for instructions): Asian, White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaskan Native,  
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

## **Instructions for Master List for Schools with Household Applications or Direct Certification Letter**

### **Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Price Meals**

Schools with several applications on file should use two separate forms, one for children eligible for free meals and a separate form for students eligible for reduced price meals.

1. List all the children currently enrolled who were eligible for free meals in the previous school year, but do not have a current application on file. Next, list the children eligible either free meals or reduced price meals. This includes all children who have a current application or a direct certification letter on file.
2. Prior-year eligibility: Mark F, if child received free meals in the prior school year. Mark R if the child received reduced price meals in the prior school year, and mark N/A if children did not receive free or reduced price meals in the prior school year. For the current year, children marked with F or R will receive the same benefits they received in the prior school year for the first 30 operational days, or until a current approved application is on file. If an approved application or direct certification letter is not on file after the first 30 operational days, the student's benefits must be terminated on the 31st day.
3. Date approved for current year: list the date that the application was approved.
4. Date benefits changed or ended: If a child's benefits change or a child is no longer enrolled in the school program, write the date benefits ended.
5. Change in status: If a child has a change in benefits, write the benefit change. Write F for free, R for reduced price, or D if a child's benefits is change to paid. A change typically occurs: after a new application is completed indicating a change in benefits; after a household fails to complete a new application after the first 30 operating days; or after benefits change because of verification.
6. Ethnicity: Indicate whether a child is Hispanic or Latino or if a child is not Hispanic or Latino. Review the household application to determine ethnicity. If an application does not indicate ethnicity, the school may determine ethnicity through visual observation, but cannot change the declaration listed on the application if the family has self-designated.
7. Race: Indicate the race of the child. Review the household application to determine race. If an application does not indicate race, the school may determine race, but cannot change the declaration listed on the application if the family has self-designated.

**Note:** All children will have ethnicity and one or more race declared either by self-declaration (what is listed on application) or what is declared by the school. Race and ethnicity are two different categories. Refer to the Civil Rights Worksheet for definition of race.

**Sample Application Verification Summary – Multiple Applications  
Used for tracking data  
For school files- do not send to ARDHS**

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>APP ID</b>	<b># OF STUDENTS ON APP</b>	<b>ORIGINAL APPROVAL</b>	<b>VERIFICATION RESULT</b>	<b>(Optional) IF NOT ELIGIBLE, REAPPROVED BY FEB. 15?</b>
		<input type="checkbox"/> FREE, FS/TANF/FDPIR # <input type="checkbox"/> FREE, HH SIZE/INCOME <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE	<input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON FS/TANF/FDPIR AGENCY RESP. <input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH NON-RESPONSE	<input type="checkbox"/> YES  <input type="checkbox"/> NO
		<input type="checkbox"/> FREE, FS/TANF/FDPIR # <input type="checkbox"/> FREE, HH SIZE/INCOME <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE	<input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON FS/TANF/FDPIR AGENCY RESP. <input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH NON-RESPONSE	<input type="checkbox"/> YES  <input type="checkbox"/> NO
		<input type="checkbox"/> FREE, FS/TANF/FDPIR # <input type="checkbox"/> FREE, HH SIZE/INCOME <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE	<input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON FS/TANF/FDPIR AGENCY RESP. <input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH NON-RESPONSE	<input type="checkbox"/> YES  <input type="checkbox"/> NO
		<input type="checkbox"/> FREE, FS/TANF/FDPIR # <input type="checkbox"/> FREE, HH SIZE/INCOME <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE	<input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON FS/TANF/FDPIR AGENCY RESP. <input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH NON-RESPONSE	<input type="checkbox"/> YES  <input type="checkbox"/> NO
		<input type="checkbox"/> FREE, FS/TANF/FDPIR # <input type="checkbox"/> FREE, HH SIZE/INCOME <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE	<input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON FS/TANF/FDPIR AGENCY RESP. <input type="checkbox"/> FREE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> REDUCED PRICE ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH DOCUMENTATION <input type="checkbox"/> PAID ELIGIBLE BASED ON HH NON-RESPONSE	<input type="checkbox"/> YES  <input type="checkbox"/> NO