

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
CONCERNING FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEAL APPLICATIONS**

1. WHEN SHOULD SCHOOLS DISTRIBUTE THE APPLICATION FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEALS?

Schools should send the information letter to households very early in the school year, which begins July 1. Applications should also be distributed on July 1 or soon thereafter. Distributing applications early in the school year ensures households have sufficient time to complete and return the application prior to the first day of school.

Additionally, schools are encouraged to provide families with information about the School Meal Programs in routine contacts throughout the school year, and remind families that applications may be submitted at any time during the school year.

Information letters may not, however, be sent to households before the end of one school year for the subsequent year, nor can the LEA (Local Educational Agency) accept and process applications before the federally defined school year, which begins on July 1. (Note: Year-round schools, however, may distribute the letters in June.)

2. WHEN CAN A SCHOOL ACCEPT AND PROCESS FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEAL APPLICATIONS?

THE LEA CANNOT ACCEPT OR PROCESS APPLICATIONS BEFORE JULY 1, WHICH IS THE BEGINNING OF THE FEDERALLY DEFINED SCHOOL YEAR.

3. MAY SCHOOLS REQUIRE ALL HOUSEHOLDS TO COMPLETE AND SUBMIT AN APPLICATION FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEALS?

NO. SCHOOLS MAY NOT REQUIRE HOUSEHOLDS TO COMPLETE AND SUBMIT AN APPLICATION. IT IS THE HOUSEHOLD'S CHOICE TO COMPLETE AND SUBMIT AN APPLICATION FOR MEAL BENEFITS. HOWEVER, LEAS MUST INFORM HOUSEHOLDS THAT THEY MAY RECEIVE MEAL BENEFITS IF THEY ARE ELIGIBLE.

4. ARE ANY PROVISIONS AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE MEALS FOR FREE TO ALL STUDENTS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR?

THE **COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION (CEP)** provides the option to offer free meals to all students in eligible high poverty LEAs and schools without collecting household applications. Eligible LEAs and schools use a claiming percentage based on the number of identified students (primarily directly certified students) of at least 25%, multiplied by a factor of 1.6, to determine a free claiming percentage. The difference between the free claiming percentage and 100% determines the percentage of meals to claim in the paid category. Eligibility is established on April 1 of the year prior to implementation. More information is available on the [DESE FNS Community Eligibility Provision](#) website.

PROVISION 2 IS AN OPTION FOR BREAKFAST AND/OR LUNCH FOR ANY SCHOOL. PROVISION 2 REQUIRES THAT THE SCHOOL SERVE MEALS TO PARTICIPATING CHILDREN AT NO CHARGE BUT REDUCES APPLICATION BURDENS TO ONCE EVERY 4 YEARS AND SIMPLIFIES MEAL COUNTING AND CLAIMING PROCEDURES BY ALLOWING A SCHOOL TO RECEIVE MEAL REIMBURSEMENT BASED ON CLAIMING PERCENTAGES ESTABLISHED DURING A BASE YEAR. DURING THE BASE YEAR, OR FIRST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION, THE SCHOOL MUST STILL PROCESS FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEAL APPLICATIONS AND MUST FOLLOW STANDARD COUNTING AND CLAIMING PROCEDURES. MORE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE ON THE [DESE FNS HANDBOOKS](#) WEBSITE.

5. WHEN WILL THE REIMBURSEMENT RATES BE AVAILABLE?

REIMBURSEMENT RATES FOR THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM AND SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM ARE USUALLY PUBLISHED IN JULY.

6. THE TRANSLATED APPLICATIONS, INCLUDING THE SPANISH APPLICATION, AVAILABLE ON THE USDA WEBSITE ARE FROM A PREVIOUS YEAR. WHERE DO I FIND TRANSLATED APPLICATIONS FOR THIS YEAR?

THERE WERE NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO THE APPLICATION. PLEASE USE PROTOTYPE APPLICATIONS THAT ARE CURRENTLY AVAILABLE ON THE [USDA WEBSITE](#), BUT PLEASE CHANGE THE DATE TO THE CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR BEFORE PROVIDING TO FAMILIES.

7. OUR LEA IS REQUIRED TO USE THE STANDARD SAMPLE METHOD FOR VERIFICATION THIS YEAR. IS THERE ANYTHING I SHOULD DO WHEN APPROVING APPLICATIONS TO PREPARE?

For the Standard method, error prone applications must be selected for verification. Error prone applications are approved applications indicating income within \$100 monthly or \$1,200 annually of the income eligibility guidelines. To help with this process, LEAs should mark applications as error prone during the application approval process. To aid in this, an optional box to mark if an application is error prone has been added to the *School Use Only* section of the

application. Some LEAs have computerized systems that identify error prone applications, so they might not need to mark individual applications. If the LEA is not using the Standard method or Alternate 2 method for verification, this additional step of marking error prone applications is not necessary. The list of LEAs required to complete the Standard sample is published on the DESE FNS website under [Verification Information](#). This list is normally available at the beginning of October, but has been made available earlier this year to help LEAs that are using the Standard sample method. A chart with the income limits and a calculator to identify error prone applications is also available with the [Verification Information](#).

8. WHAT IS THE MAXIMUM PRICE THAT CAN BE CHARGED FOR A REDUCED PRICE MEAL?

The maximum price for a reduced price lunch is 40 cents, the maximum price for a reduced price breakfast is 30 cents, and the maximum price for a reduced price afterschool snack is 15 cents. ([7 CFR 245.2](#), [7 CFR 210.9\(c\)\(4\)](#), [7 CFR 226.23\(c\)\(6\)](#))