

School Nutrition Programs

2015-16 Requirements for Collection of the Application for Educational Benefits and Household Income Guidelines

This information applies to all local educational agencies (LEA) that participate in School Nutrition Programs (SNP), except the following types of LEAs that will not need to collect applications for school meal benefits during school year 2015-16:

- Residential child care institutions that have an approved resident income policy and no day-only students.
- Nonpublic schools that are approved to participate, for all meal services, in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2 or 3 (not a base year).
- Environmental learning centers or any school that serves only students whose school meal eligibility status already has been determined by another LEA.

Highlights for School Year 2015-16

1. Revised Application for Educational Benefits

The Application for Educational Benefits has been revised based on updates from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The changes are expected to reduce errors on applications and follow-up time with households.

- The household now can fill in circles in the Household Income section of the form to indicate the frequency of incomes (instead of the writing in “BW” for biweekly etc.)
- Sources of income are now grouped into three categories instead of five.
- A statement has been added on the application to either write in “0” or leave the section blank to indicate no income. This certifies to the LEA that there is no income to report in the section. The column for “no income” that was previously on the form has been removed.
- The last four digits of the Social Security number are now collected in the Household Income section instead of the Signature section.
- Any regular income to children is now reported in the Household Income section.

- The civil rights section for race and ethnicity of children has been moved to the front page of the application form. This allows race and ethnicity to be selected for each child. (Public schools, or any school that already has collected race/ethnicity data on its students, may remove the race/ethnicity section from the application form.)
- The approval/denial and verification sections used by the LEA have been moved to the back page of the application.
- A statement has been added, on the back page, to explain that the form is not needed for meal benefits at CEP schools, and Provision 2 and 3 schools that offer all meals at no charge. If an LEA has no CEP or Provision 2 or 3 schools, this section may be removed from the form.

2. State Funds for School Meals at No Charge

State funds authorized by the Minnesota Legislature will continue to help more students to receive school lunches and breakfasts at no charge.

- ***State funds help provide school meals at no charge to students who qualify for reduced-price school meals.*** State funds will continue to provide the 40 cents per reduced-price lunch and 30 cents per reduced-price breakfast that households usually would pay. Be sure to claim these meals in the correct category (reduced-price) so that the correct federal and state reimbursements are paid.
- ***State funds help provide breakfast at no charge to all participating kindergarten students.*** State funds will continue to provide the difference between federal breakfast payments and full reimbursement for breakfasts served to kindergarten students who qualify for paid meals. Be sure to claim these breakfasts in the correct category according to claiming instructions, so that the correct federal and state reimbursements are paid.

3. Community Eligibility Provision and the Application for Educational Benefits

School year 2015-16 is the second year that eligible LEAs may apply for schools to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Schools that are approved for CEP do not need to collect Applications for Educational Benefits for the purpose of school meal benefits. This also applies to Provision 2 or 3 schools that provide all meals at no charge.

However public schools that participate in CEP or Provision 2 or 3 for all meal services will need to continue to collect household applications in order to report the “economic indicator” for students on MARSS. The economic indicator data is used to calculate public schools’ state compensatory revenue funds and provide demographics for assessment records.

- **Partial CEP – Use the Standard Application for Educational Benefits**
LEAs with some, but not all, schools participating in CEP may use the standard Application for Educational Benefits for all households at all schools.

- Full CEP – Use the Alternative Application for Educational Benefits

LEAs with all schools participating in CEP may not use the standard Application for Education Benefits. An **alternative version** of the Application for Educational Benefits, with the references to school meals removed, is available from the School Finance Division of MDE. [View School Finance / MARSS – Student Accounting](#)

Allowable Costs: The costs of distributing and processing applications that are not needed for school meal benefits are unallowable costs to the school food service account.

Distribution of Application Packets for School Year 2015-16

Households must be informed about the availability of school meal benefits before the beginning of the school year. Application materials should be distributed within the four weeks prior to the first day of school.

- Application packets for school year 2015-16 may not be distributed before **July 1, 2015**, the date that the household income guidelines are effective. Online application systems may not open for 2015-16 applications before July 1, 2015. For year-round schools only that will operate in July 2015, applications may be distributed in June 2015.
- Online systems: LEAs with an online application system must notify households about how to apply and that a paper application is available upon request.
- Directly certified students: Do not send application packets to households where students have been directly certified for free school meals. Those households must be notified that they have been directly certified.
- LEAs may not require households to complete applications. LEAs may facilitate the return of applications from households, for example by providing return envelopes.

2015-16 Application Packet

[View 2015-16 Application for Educational Benefits packet](#). The application packet includes:

1. Household Letter (1 page)
2. Instructions for completing the application (1 page – may be copied on back of the household letter)
3. Application for Educational Benefits (2 pages – copy back to back – second page must be included).

(Also refer to the information below about Other Required Annual Notifications that may be included in the application packet.)

Carryover of Meal Benefits from Previous School Year

School meal benefits that were approved in school year 2014-15 (from applications and direct certifications) must be carried over into the beginning of school year 2015-16. Meal benefits must be carried over for the LEA's first 30 operating school days of school year 2015-16, or up to the date that 2015-16 meal benefits have been approved or denied for a student based on a 2015-16 application or direct certification, whichever date comes first.

Application Approval Procedures

School meal benefits are approved for the whole school year. Once an application has been approved, meal benefits are terminated or changed only when required due to verification or administrative review, or terminated at the request of a household. Households do not need to notify their LEA of changes in household income or size during the year.

The following references for reviewing and approving Applications for Educational Benefits are available on the MDE website. [View SNP/Applications-Student Meals:](#)

- *Procedures for Approval/Denial of Applications* (2 pages) These procedures describe which sections of an application must be completed, depending on the type of application - household income, case number, or foster child application.
- *USDA Eligibility Manual for School Meals* (106 pages) The manual has details on all parts of the application and verification process including data privacy.

Conversion to Annual Income

When an application has incomes that are paid at different frequencies, the LEA must convert each income to an annual income and add the annual incomes together for the total household income.

To convert to annual income:

- Multiply a weekly income by 52.
- Multiply a bi-weekly income (every other week) by 26.
- Multiply a twice-per-month income by 24.
- Multiply a monthly income by 12.

Example: A household reports incomes of \$500 received every two weeks and \$1,000 received monthly. Since the incomes are paid at different frequencies, they must be converted to annual incomes in order to add them together.

\$500 bi-weekly income x 26 = \$13,000 annual income.

\$1,000 monthly income x 12 = \$12,000 annual income.

Add the annual incomes for a total annual household income of \$25,000.

Categorical Eligibility / Extension to All Household Members

If any household member reports a case number that appears valid from one of the programs listed below, all of the students in the household are approved for free school meals based on categorical (automatic) eligibility.

Categorical Eligibility:

If any person in a household has a case number from one of these three programs, all students in the household have categorical (automatic) eligibility for free school meal benefits.

- Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP).
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).

If a household has not checked a box for one of the three assistance programs, but has provided a valid case number as described below (and also children's names and adult signature), the application is complete and may be approved.

Valid case numbers:

- MFIP and SNAP case numbers in Minnesota contain between four (4) and eight (8) digits and no letter prefix. The number is assigned to the person who applied for benefits.
- FDPIR case numbers in Minnesota are nine (9) digits (head of household's Social Security number). The number may be hyphenated.

Invalid case numbers:

Other assistance programs, for example *Medical Assistance* and *WIC*, are *not* categorically eligible. Households that receive Medical Assistance or WIC should check the household income guidelines for school meals to see whether they should complete an Application for Educational Benefits based on their household income.

Directly Certified Students: Application packets should not be sent to households with students who have been certified for free school meals using 2015-16 direct certification data. MDE will provide the first direct certification data for school year 2015-16 in late June 2015.

Extension to all students in the household: If one child in a household is directly certified, then all children that the school district knows to be in the same household are also considered to be directly certified.

- Exception: Direct certification of foster children applies to individual children. Foster certification may not be extended to other children in the household.

Application for Student from Residential Child Care Institution: When a student living in a residential child care institution (RCCI), for example a group home, attends an LEA, the RCCI director should complete the application for the student and indicate that the application is for a

student in residential care. The completed application must identify the child, list any regular income that is available to the student and be signed by the RCCI director.

Or the RCCI may provide the school with a copy of the RCCI's *SNP Residential Income Policy*, which documents that all residents qualify for free school meals.

Consent to Release Data for Health Insurance Purposes

The state of Minnesota continues to notify eligible families about the availability of health care coverage through Minnesota Health Care Programs, for example MinnesotaCare. Step 4 of the Application for Educational Benefits records whether a household has declined to share their eligibility information for this purpose. This is a “negative check-off” – the household’s school meals eligibility for free or reduced-price meals may be shared with health insurance programs unless the household has checked the box to indicate that information may not be shared. Public schools report this data element for students in MARSS.

Civil Rights Racial/Ethnic Data

LEAs must maintain documentation of the race and ethnicity of students for civil rights purposes. The section for households to indicate race and ethnicity of children is now on the front page of the application form. Race and ethnicity is indicated for each child.

If an LEA already has a system for collecting racial/ethnic data for all students, for example on student enrollment records, the race/ethnicity section should be removed from the Application for Educational Benefits.

Translations

Spanish, Somali and Hmong translations of the 2015-16 application packet will be available on the MDE website. Also a link is provided to the USDA website which has the USDA prototype application packet available in over 30 languages.

[View links to translated application packets](#)

Notification of Approval or Denial of Benefits

The letter for notifying households of approval or denial of school meal benefits is available on the MDE website. [View Approval/Denial Letter - Word version](#).

Reporting Economic Indicator on MARSS (Public Schools)

The “economic indicator” reported annually by public schools on student MARSS records is based on student eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals (or approval of the alternative Application for Educational Benefits form at CEP or Provision 2 or 3 schools).

The economic indicator on 2015-16 MARSS data must be based only on 2015-16 applications and direct certifications. The indicator may *not* be based on temporary eligibility for meal benefits that has been carried over from school year 2014-15 to the first 30 operating days of school year 2015-16.

Verification of Information Provided on Applications

Each fall an LEA must verify a percentage (usually three percent) of approved Applications for Educational Benefits. In addition, any application may be verified “for cause” at any time. The memorandum on verification requirements for school year 2015-16 will be posted on the MDE website in August 2015.

Other Required Notifications to Include in the Application Packet

The application packet for school meals can be used to meet other annual notification requirements.

1. Annual Outreach about School Breakfast Program

LEAs (public and private) that have one or more sites that offer the School Breakfast Program (SBP) must provide outreach about the benefits of the breakfast program at least annually. Breakfast outreach materials should be included in the annual school meals application packet.

- [View breakfast flyers and other marketing resources on the Discover School Breakfast Resource Materials page of USDA website](#)

2. Annual Outreach about Minnesota Health Care Programs (Public Schools)

State law requires public LEAs to notify families each year about the availability of health care programs like MinnesotaCare. This requirement may be met by including the 2015-16 Minnesota Health Care Programs flyer (created by the Minnesota Department of Human Services) in the annual school meals application packet.

- [View Minnesota Health Care Programs Flyer - English](#) (2 pages)
- [View Minnesota Health Care Programs Flyer - Spanish](#) (2 pages)

If you have any questions about this information, contact MDE – Safety, Health and Nutrition at 651-582-8526, 1-800-366-8922 (MN Toll-free) or mde.fns@state.mn.us.

For School Use Only
School Nutrition Programs
Household Income Guidelines for School Year 2015-16
 Effective July 1, 2015

Household Size of One (1)

FREQUENCY OF INCOME	FREE MEALS \$ RANGE	REDUCED-PRICE MEALS \$ RANGE	PAID MEALS \$ RANGE
Weekly	0 – 295	296 – 419	420
2 Weeks	0 – 589	590– 838	839
2 X Month	0 – 638	639 – 908	909 or more
Monthly	0 – 1,276	1,277 – 1,815	1,816
Yearly	0 – 15,301	15,302 – 21,775	21,776

Household Size of Two (2)

FREQUENCY OF INCOME	FREE MEALS \$ RANGE	REDUCED-PRICE MEALS \$ RANGE	PAID MEALS \$ RANGE
Weekly	0 – 399	400 – 567	568
2 Weeks	0 – 797	798 – 1,134	1,135
2 X Month	0 – 863	864 – 1,228	1,229 or more
Monthly	0 – 1,726	1,727 – 2,456	2,457
Yearly	0 – 20,709	20,710 – 29,471	29,472

Household Size of Three (3)

FREQUENCY OF INCOME	FREE MEALS \$ RANGE	REDUCED-PRICE MEALS \$ RANGE	PAID MEALS \$ RANGE
Weekly	0 – 503	504 - 715	716
2 Weeks	0 – 1,005	1,006 – 1,430	1,431
2 X Month	0 – 1,089	1,090 – 1,549	1,550 or more
Monthly	0 – 2,177	2,178 – 3,098	3,099
Yearly	0 – 26,117	26,118 – 37,167	37,168

Household Size of Four (4)

FREQUENCY OF INCOME	FREE MEALS \$ RANGE	REDUCED-PRICE MEALS \$ RANGE	PAID MEALS \$ RANGE
Weekly	0 – 607	608 - 863	864
2 Weeks	0 – 1,213	1,214 – 1,726	1,727
2 X Month	0 – 1,314	1,315 – 1,870	1,871 or more
Monthly	0 – 2,628	2,629 – 3,739	3,740
Yearly	0 – 31,525	31,526 – 44, 863	44,864

Household Size of Five (5)

FREQUENCY OF INCOME	FREE MEALS \$ RANGE	REDUCED-PRICE MEALS \$ RANGE	PAID MEALS \$ RANGE
Weekly	0 – 711	712 – 1,011	1,012
2 Weeks	0 – 1,421	1,422 – 2,022	2,023
2 X Month	0 – 1,539	1,540 – 2,190	2,191 or more
Monthly	0 – 3,078	3,079 – 4,380	4,381
Yearly	0 – 36,933	36,934 – 52,559	52,560

Household Size of Six (6)

FREQUENCY OF INCOME	FREE MEALS \$ RANGE	REDUCED-PRICE MEALS \$ RANGE	PAID MEALS \$ RANGE
Weekly	0 – 815	816 – 1,159	1,160
2 Weeks	0 – 1,629	1,630 – 2,318	2,319
2 X Month	0 – 1,765	1,766 – 2,511	2,512 or more
Monthly	0 – 3,529	3,530 – 5,022	5,023
Yearly	0 – 42,341	42,342 – 60,255	60,256

Household Size of Seven (7)

FREQUENCY OF INCOME	FREE MEALS \$ RANGE	REDUCED-PRICE MEALS \$ RANGE	PAID MEALS \$ RANGE
Weekly	0 – 919	920 – 1,307	1,308
2 Weeks	0 – 1,837	1,838 – 2,614	2,615
2 X Month	0 – 1,990	1,991 – 2,832	2,833 or more
Monthly	0 – 3,980	3,981 – 5,663	5,664
Yearly	0 – 47,749	47,750 – 67,951	67,952

Household Size of Eight (8)

FREQUENCY OF INCOME	FREE MEALS \$ RANGE	REDUCED-PRICE MEALS \$ RANGE	PAID MEALS \$ RANGE
Weekly	0 – 1,023	1,024 – 1,455	1,456
2 Weeks	0 – 2,045	2,046 – 2,910	2,911
2 X Month	0 – 2,215	2,216 – 3,152	3,153 or more
Monthly	0 – 4,430	4,431 – 6,304	6,305
Yearly	0 – 53,157	53,158 – 75,647	75,648

Free Meals – add for each additional household member:

Frequency	Amount
Weekly	\$104
2 Weeks	\$208
2 X Month	\$226
Monthly	\$451
Yearly	\$5,408

Reduced-Price Meals – add for each additional household member:

Frequency	Amount
Weekly	\$148
2 Weeks	\$296
2 X Month	\$321
Monthly	\$642
Yearly	\$7,696