

OSPI CNS School Meal Programs Reference Sheet

Free and Reduced-Price Meal Application Materials and Information

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP) must make free and reduced-price meals available to students. Meal application materials must be made available to all households and are updated annually to reflect changes to income guidelines and program regulation. Materials are posted to the webpage at the beginning of June each year.

Items available on the [Child Nutrition Services \(CNS\) Free and Reduced-Price Information webpage](#):

- ✓ Eligibility Manual for School Meals (current version July 2017)
- ✓ Application Materials
 - United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) income guidelines (effective July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020)
 - Applications for Free and Reduced-Price Meals
 - LEAs must identify where applications should be returned.
 - Letter to Households Templates
 - Consent to Share Eligibility Template
 - Notice of Eligibility Templates
 - Translated School Meal Applications
 - USDA Application Materials
- ✓ Reference sheets
- ✓ Training videos

Additional Information

✓ **Eligibility Manual for School Meals**

The Eligibility Manual for School Meals is the USDA guiding document for determining household eligibility for meals and disclosure of free and reduced-price eligibility information.

✓ **Letter to Households and Applications**

Letter to Households must be distributed at the beginning of the school year to households of children attending the school. These letters inform families which meal programs are available and notifies households meals may be available for free or at a reduced-price. Letters to Households and Applications for Free and Reduced-Price Meals must be sent before or near the beginning of the school year, but may not be sent before July 1 of each year.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must use the state prototype Letter to Households and Application for Free and Reduced-Price Meals or the USDA prototype available on [USDA's Applying for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals Information Page](#).

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- **Free and Reduced-Price Meal Applications**

The application allows households to apply for free and reduced-price meal benefits.
- **Web-based and Scanned Meal Application Materials**

A [reference sheet is available](#) highlighting the requirements for web-based and scanned meal applications. LEAs are responsible to ensure meal application materials meet all USDA requirements.
- **Letter to Households**

There are three versions of the Letter to Households. Choose the letter based on LEA type and program operations.

 - Public School Districts
 - Private Schools & Residential Child Care Institutions
 - Non-Pricing Programs and Provision 2 Programs operating a base year
- **Provision 2 schools during non-base years and CEP schools should use the Family Income Survey, available on the CNS Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Provision 2 webpage.**
- ✓ **Consent to Share Information**

LEAs have two options to allow households to share eligibility information with school officials for reduced fees for other programs. LEAs may add a section to the meal application or use the [Consent to Share Child Nutrition Program Eligibility Information for Other School Programs form](#). This form allows the sharing of eligibility information with school officials for reduced fees for other programs and may be sent home with the letter notifying households they have been directly certified for free meals.
- ✓ **Limited English Proficiency Households**

LEAs must ensure students have access to school meals by meeting the language needs of your school district population. USDA translates application materials into 33 languages to help you meet this need. Child Nutrition Services will translate all state-prototype materials to Spanish.
- ✓ **Media Release for Free and Reduced-Price Meals**

Regulations require the public be notified school meal programs are available in a school or school district. OSPI provides a public release to the media that meets this regulation. However, LEAs are encouraged to provide a release and a supply of meal application forms to local organizations that provide assistance to low-income families such as food banks; Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinics; post offices; and employment security offices. An assurance there will be no discrimination against LEP households must be included.

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✓ Processing Applications

LEAs must process applications within 10 working days. Income Guidelines are available on the [CNS Free and Reduced-Price Information webpage](#).

- The **determining official** is the individual(s) responsible for reviewing and approving free and reduced-price meal applications.
 - Applications should be marked to indicate category, signed, and dated by the determining official.
- The **hearing official** is the individual responsible for reviewing and making a determination regarding an appeal to a benefit determination. The hearing official and determining official cannot be the same person.
- The Letter to Household should include the name of the hearing official and the individual who can provide alternative means of communication to persons who require program information in other formats.

✓ Notice of Eligibility Determination Letters

Households must be notified of their eligibility status. Households with children who are approved for free or reduced-price meal benefits may be notified in writing or verbally. Households with children who are denied benefits must be provided with written notification of the denial through mail or e-mail.

LEAs may use the following prototype Notice of Eligibility letters available on the CNS Free and Reduced-Price Information webpage.

- Notice of Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Meals
- Notice of Eligibility for Free Meals – Directly Certified
- Notice of Eligibility for Free Meals or Reduced-Price Meals – Direct Certification Medicaid
- Notice of Denied Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price Meals

LEAs that use their own notification/denial letters must include in the denial letter:

- Reason for denial of benefits;
- Right to appeal;
- Instructions on how to appeal;
- Ability to reapply for benefits at any time during the year if their household circumstances change; and
- USDA Non-discrimination statement.

LEAs may use the letters produced by their electronic systems. Ensure the letters meet all of the requirements outlined in the [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#).

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Resources:

- [CNS Free and Reduced-Price Information webpage](#)
- [Consent to Share Child Nutrition Program Eligibility Information for Other School Programs form](#)
- [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#)
- [USDA's Applying for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals Information Page](#)
- [Web-Based Applications reference sheet](#)

Acronym Reference

-CNS	Child Nutrition Services
-FDP	Food Distribution Program
-OSPI	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
-USDA	United States Department of Agriculture