



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Sponsors of the National School Lunch, School Breakfast and Special Milk Programs

FROM: John Frassinelli, Chief 
Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education

DATE: June 17, 2015

SUBJECT: **Operational Memorandum #27-15**

- I. Overview of Available Free and Reduced Price Application Materials
- II. Information for the Implementation of Free/Reduced Price Meals and Free Milk Benefits for School Year (SY) 2015-16
- III. Income Eligibility Guidelines (IEG) for July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016
- IV. Application for the After School Snack Program

I. Overview of Available Free and Reduced Price Application Materials

There is a new look to the Free and Reduced Price application. It is important that all old application forms and letters (dated prior to 5/2015) be discarded and not used in SY 2015-16.

This memorandum addresses materials that are needed to implement free and reduced price meals, after school snack and milk benefits. These updated forms may be found on the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Child Nutrition Web site](#) and will be available after June 1, 2015. Most of these materials will be available in both the PDF *and* Word formats. Please read this information carefully and share with appropriate personnel. In addition, school districts are encouraged to use foreign language free and reduced price materials when necessary. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides samples of [foreign language materials](#).

A few important reminders:

1. School districts are required to use family/household applications and **may not request that households complete separate family applications for each school.** Districts must use the most recent USDA [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#) when processing applications and conducting verification.
2. Foster children are considered categorically eligible and a separate household application is not required. There are a few ways that a school can determine a foster child as being eligible for free meals:
 - a. the determining official (the person who approves the free and reduced meal application) receives a copy from the foster parent, of the legal document or legal court order showing that the child is a foster child;
 - b. the determining official requests and receives a copy of the Department of Children and Family Services 603 form for SY 2016 from the Board of Education or school's main office indicating that the child is a foster child; or
 - c. the foster parent completes a free and reduced meal application and checks off that the child is a foster child and lists the child's personal use income if applicable. Note that a foster child is categorically eligible for free meals and may be included as a member of the foster family if the foster family chooses

to also apply for benefits. If the foster family is not eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits, it does not prevent a foster child from receiving free meal benefits; however, a foster child's free eligibility **does not** automatically extend to all students in the household. For more information regarding foster children, refer to the USDA [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#).

3. Households must be informed on the free and reduced price application that Women, Infants and Children participants may be eligible for free or reduced price meals.
4. Homeless and runaway youth are categorically eligible for free meals.
5. Privatized military housing allowance is excluded from income eligibility determinations.
6. Eligibility determinations are valid for the entire school year unless the status changes due to verification.
7. Sponsors **must extend categorical eligibility to additional children in a household**. (Note that this does NOT include the status of categorical eligibility for households that have foster children or for children determined to be free based on enrollment in a Head Start or Even Start Program.) For direct certification with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Temporary Family Assistance and applications submitted with case numbers for these programs, ALL children in the family, as defined in 7 CFR 245.2 are categorically eligible for free meals. Refer to the USDA [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#) for more information.
8. Residential Child Care Institutions must refer to these materials if day clients are served and claimed for free or reduced price reimbursement.
9. Special Milk Programs (SMP) must refer to these materials if free milk is claimed and served. Note: The parent letter for the SMP is different from the parent letter for meals. Also, the Media/Press Release for the SMP must only contain the Free IEGs.
10. Direct Certification must be utilized by all Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The district's direct certification contact person for each LEA will be required to access a [Direct Certification Web Application](#) page which will provide a list of students enrolled in the district that are directly certified. As a reminder, if a child's name appears in the database *and* the parent/guardian submits a free and reduced price meal application for this child, direct certification takes precedence over the application and the child should be recorded as directly certified and automatically eligible for free meals. Also, all School Food Authorities (SFAs) are required to notify parents/guardians of their child's direct certification and automatic eligibility of free meals/milk.
11. Do not forget to include the instruction page and parent notification letter with the application form.

II. Information for the Implementation of Free/Reduced Price Meals and Free Milk Benefits for School Year 2015-16

1. Sample Policy Statement for Free and Reduced Price Meals, After School Snack Program and Free Milk

This sample provides a framework for developing procedures to dispense lunch, breakfast, snacks and milk without regard to

children's ability to pay. As a reminder, districts will not be required to submit a paper Policy Statement form. Since there is an Agreement (ED 099) on file with the CSDE and all LEAs are required to update their online agreement and site information sheets annually, a revised Policy Statement is only required if significant changes exist in the Programs. Refer to the Policy Statement for more information.

2. Sample Parent/Guardian Letter to Households – School Meals and Snacks

A parent letter must be completed with the school district's specific program information. Make enough copies to provide one copy for each household.

3. Sample Parent/Guardian Letter to Households – Special Milk Program

The SMP Sample letter is appropriate if the sponsor:

- a. operates only a SMP with a free milk option; or
- b. operates a SMP with a free milk option in split-day session kindergarten.

4. Sample Application and Instructions for Free or Reduced Price Meals or Free Milk Family/Household Application

Many households have different sources of income at different frequencies, such as weekly or bi-weekly wages and monthly social security benefits. The following procedures must be followed and refer to the USDA [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#) for more information:

- a. if a household has only one income source, or if all sources are the same frequency, do not use conversion factors. Compare the income or the sum of the incomes to the published IEG for the appropriate frequency and household size to make the eligibility determination; or
- b. if a household reports income sources at more than one frequency, the preferred method is to annualize all income by multiplying weekly income by 52, income received every two weeks by 26, income received twice a month by 24 and income received monthly by 12.

Do not round the values resulting from each conversion. Sum all the unrounded converted values and compare the unrounded total to the published IEG for annual income for the appropriate household size.

5. Addenda

Included with these application samples on the Web site are three additional pages referred to as an *Addendum A*, *Addendum B* and *Addendum C*. The reason for the Addenda is that schools increasingly use income eligibility data to offer other benefits to students. **DO NOT distribute these addenda to parents without reason. Review the purposes of each addendum and use if appropriate.** Note: Child Nutrition Program regulations require that school districts must have parents/guardians' written permission in order to release certain information. If a school district wishes to offer additional benefits to students, attach the Addenda to the free and reduced price meal application. Please see [Samples Addendum A](#),

Addendum B and Addendum C to determine if these will be included in the determination process. Also, exclude the “Optional wording for sponsors” on the *Parent/guardian letter to the households* if Addenda A or B are not used.

- **Addendum A** – *Addendum to Application for Free or Reduced Price Meals or Free Milk Benefits*. Use this Addendum only if the school district offers additional benefits to students based on the students’ income eligibility. Note that the parent/guardian has to specifically authorize (sign) to allow information to be released for each benefit. This form requires the district to list each benefit being offered and to **specify the entity** that is offering the benefit. **DO NOT send this Addendum out blank**. Please contact the Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) office with questions.
- **Addendum B** – *HUSKY Insurance Plan*. In cooperation with the DSS and the school nurse, each district is strongly encouraged to include Addendum B in the distribution mailing to parents. Please note that form has been updated for SY 2015/16.
- **Addendum C** – *Information on SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* helps the DSS outreach to the parents/guardians in the district. Some children and their families may be eligible for SNAP benefits if they are also eligible for free meals. Therefore, in an effort to conduct outreach to these potential SNAP recipients, districts should consider including Addendum C with the distribution of free and reduced price materials.

6. Sample Parent/Guardian Notification Letter

SFAs are required to notify parents/guardians of children’s eligibility for benefits as soon as possible upon determination. This includes households of children who were directly certified based on the direct certification list.

7. Sample Media/Public Release

SFAs are **required** to publicly notify their communities that benefits are being offered. SFAs are not required to pay for this notification. However, SFAs are required to develop a media/press release and to document the date when the information was released to the media. Additionally, SFAs must make every effort to notify the community of these benefits by utilizing other means (i.e., sending a notice to a large corporation anticipating layoffs or posting information on a community bulletin board).

8. Written Collection Procedures

SFAs must have written procedures for each site that describe how the children receive their meals, snacks and milk in a way that protects their privacy concerning household economic status while maintaining accuracy. Meals, snacks and milk must be counted accurately **at the point that they are served**. Sponsors may use tickets, tokens, rosters, pin numbers or other

processes to identify children’s eligibility for benefits. Overt identification of a child’s eligibility status must be prevented at all times. **If procedures change, the amended [collection procedure](#) must be forwarded to the district’s CNP technical support person for approval.**

The Web site contains a sample collection procedure description form. Sponsors are to develop a narrative of the actual processes in place in their schools and retain these on file.

III. IEG for July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016

These guidelines have been updated and are found on the [Child Nutrition Program Web site](#).

IV. Application for the After School Snack Program

The application for the [After School Snack Program](#) will be available after **July 1, 2015**. *Please note that all applications must be submitted to the CNP for approval **two weeks prior to the start of the After School Snack Program**.* Questions regarding the After School Snack Program may be directed to Jackie Schipke at jackie.schipke@ct.gov.

Questions pertaining to this memorandum may be directed to the following:

| Consultants for School Nutrition Programs | |
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| County | Consultant |
| ▪ Fairfield County | Fionnuala Brown fionnuala.brown@ct.gov 860-807-2129 |
| ▪ Hartford County (towns/cities beginning with A-R) | Teri Dandeneau teri.dandeneau@ct.gov 860-807-2079 |
| ▪ Hartford County (towns/cities beginning with S-W) ▪ Windham County | Susan Alston susan.alston@ct.gov 860-807-2081 |
| ▪ Litchfield County | Allison Calhoun-White allison.calhoun-white@ct.gov 860-807-2008 |
| ▪ Middlesex County ▪ Tolland County | Andy Paul andrew.paul@ct.gov 860-807-2048 |
| ▪ New Haven County | Jackie Schipke jackie.schipke@ct.gov 860-807-2123 |
| ▪ New London County | Monica Pacheco monica.pacheco@ct.gov 860-807-2073 |

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