

# HEALTHY MEALS. HEALTHY MINDS.

## It makes Meal Sense.

As your school nutrition partner, we are dedicated to ensuring all students are well-fed throughout the year and ready to learn. More students than ever before may be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, like breakfast, lunch, and snacks —provided to students whose families meet certain income requirements. Families may apply at any time to ensure their child has a healthy meal at school every day.



## Why do families need to apply for free or reduced-price school meals?

This school year, there will no longer be automatic free school meals for all students. The federal waiver that was in place as a result of the pandemic has now expired, and we must once again collect annual applications for free and reduced-price meals - a meal benefits program administered through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Feeding every child is a year-round opportunity and we want to maximize the number of families that take advantage of this program. We encourage you to check your family's eligibility and apply - it's easy, risk-free, and confidential. Income-eligibility guidelines are available online to help you determine eligibility based on your household size and income level.

Visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) website for details:  
[www.fns.usda.gov/cn/income-eligibility-guidelines](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/income-eligibility-guidelines)

## Applying for the program helps students and schools

We are committed to helping your child's school maximize student enrollment into this program. Helping eligible children qualify for free or reduced-price school meals, as well as ensuring they actually grab a school breakfast and lunch each day, keeps our students well fed and nourished. But also, for each free or reduced-price meal we serve in the cafeteria, the school district is eligible to collect federal funds available for this purpose. These funds are important for schools to maintain and enhance the food service operation.



## Risk-free application.

Information collected in the application is confidential and will be used only for evaluating the eligibility of students for free or reduced-priced school meals. The process is non-discriminatory and the meal status is kept confidential. This means that other students will not know if a student is receiving free or reduced-price meals. If approved for free meals, students are provided a reimbursable meal at no charge. If approved for reduced-price meals, students are provided a reimbursable meal at a rate less than the full price of the meal.

You can contact your school at any time for an application or more details about the program.

## How can you advocate for others?

If you find yourself in a prominent position within your community, such as the Parent Teacher Association, you may be able to help raise awareness about this program. Many families that are going through financial hardships or experiencing food insecurity, and are eligible to participate, are unaware of eligibility requirements or the ease of applying.

We want families to feel comfortable to seek guidance and support. For many, this might mean reaching out to an existing relationship with school administrators and the PTA. You may help direct parents to an application, available through the Food and Nutrition Services department, schools, and at some locations throughout the community. **An application can be filled out at any point during the school year for the remainder of that year.**



## IN ORDER TO BE APPROVED FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICED MEALS, AN APPLICATION MUST BE COMPLETED EACH YEAR.

The only exception to this is if the child is directly certified by the state for free meals. So, those parents that do not receive a letter telling them their child is pre-approved must complete an application. It is important that each part of the application is filled out completely in order for the application to be processed.

# HELPFUL INFORMATION IF YOU ARE APPLYING FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE SCHOOL MEALS

### **Do I have to be a U.S. citizen to qualify for an application?**

No, you may apply regardless of whether you or your children are United States citizens.

### **Where can I find an application in my language?**

Visit the USDA site at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/translated-applications> to see if an application is available in your language.

### **Does the application stay the same every year?**

Applications are changed and updated every year; so, a new application must be submitted.

### **Why do I have to apply this year, when meals were free all last year?**

Since the pandemic, the federal government had waivers in place that made it possible for school meals to be free of charge to all student. Those waivers expired June 30, 2022. So for the 2022-23 school year, meals will again be served according to the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program requirements, and again, families must apply for free or reduced-price school meals.

### **When should I complete the application?**

You can begin applying in July. However, **applications are accepted throughout the school year. Contact your school district for guidance on how to complete an application.**

### **Does every family have to submit an application?**

Families that do not automatically qualify (directly certified) must re-apply every year.

### **How do I know if I am directly certified (automatically qualify)?**

A letter will be mailed to your home. Please ensure your address is current with the Central Registration Office.

### **If I receive a directly certified letter and one of my children is not listed, what should I do?**

At the bottom of the letter, add your child's name and resubmit it to the correct department.

### **If I have more than one child, how many applications do I have to complete?**

One application per household is to be completed. You do not need a separate application for each child.

### **Where can I access the application?**

You may apply online or visit your school's main office for a paper application. Online applications provide the fastest and most accurate submission and validation.

### **Do I have to show proof of income?**

A percentage of all applications are audited for review. If your application is chosen, you must provide proof of income in the proper time frame, as requested.

### **Why is it important to complete the free and reduced application?**

School funding is determined through this process. Those who qualify for free and reduced-price meals may also be eligible for other benefits, such as more affordable internet service through your local internet provider. An example is Comcast's Internet Essentials Program ([apply.internetessentials.com](http://apply.internetessentials.com)).

### **Who can I contact if I have questions about the application?**

Visit your school district website for more information or contact the food service office at your district.

