

## Critical Information for the Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals

- The Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals cannot be completed and signed before July 1 of the effective school year. Annually, Income Eligibility Guidelines (IEG) are effective from July 1 to June 30.
- The Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals materials are available in several languages. The translations of [application materials](#)<sup>i</sup> can be found at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/translated-applications>.
- Programs may modify the following prototypes to include logos and contact information, but any additional changes need to be approved by MDE annually: Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals, Frequently Asked Questions about Free and Reduced-Price School Meals, Approval-Disapproval Letter to Parents.
- Every year, MDE will release to all editors/publishers of local media outlets in Michigan the Annual Public Notice for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs. This publication meets the requirement of a Public (Media) Release being provided to the local news media. However, Local Education Agencies (LEA) are responsible to forward the public release to any major employer who is contemplating large layoffs in the attendance area of its school.

### Application Approval Process Information

- Refer to the [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#)<sup>ii</sup> when approving free and reduced-price school meals.
- LEAs are responsible for ensuring that the certification process meets all regulatory requirements and policies for application processing and approval. If software is used to perform all or part of the certification process, the LEA must ensure the software used is performing correctly and is meeting all requirements.
- LEAs must carry over the eligibility status from the previous school year for up to 30 days. Any prior school year applications used beyond the 30<sup>th</sup> day of operation are not valid for free and reduced-price meal benefits and will result in fiscal action.
- Eligibility determinations are valid for the entire school year.
- Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Bridge Cards are now used throughout the state of Michigan. The EBT Bridge Card Number is a 16-digit numerical number, for example: 1234 2345 3456 4567, while **the Food Assistance Program (FAP) Case Number is a numerical number, with a total number of 9 digits beginning with the number 1**. The USDA has determined that the number on a household's EBT Bridge Card cannot be accepted as a FAP Case Number on applications for meal benefits. As LEAs receive and review applications for meal benefits, they must ensure that households providing a FAP Case Number in Part 2 of the application are providing a FAP Case Number and not an EBT Bridge Card Number.
- If a household has only one income source, or if all sources are the same frequency (e.g., all weekly), do not use conversion factors. Compare the income or the sum of the incomes to the published Income Eligibility Guidelines (IEG) for the appropriate frequency and household size to make the eligibility determination.
- If a household reports income sources at more than one frequency, the correct method is to annualize all income. Annual Income Conversion: weekly x 52; every 2 weeks x 26; twice a month x 24; or monthly x 12. Do not round the values resulting from each conversion. Add all the unrounded converted values and compare the unrounded total to the published IEG for annual income for the appropriate household size.
- All applications for the students in a particular building must be easily retrievable. A household application

can be filed and retrieved by a number system using a computer database or spreadsheet cross-reference system. A cross-reference system might use an application number given to each household family application. A child in the household would have their application number listed with their information on the building rosters. The system used must clearly identify the location of the family application for any child listed on that application.

- Every month sponsors must retain an updated roster of students eligible for free, reduced-price, and paid school meals. This record serves as a basis for the claim for reimbursement and for audit and review purposes. It must be kept three years after the date of the final claim for reimbursement for the fiscal year to which it pertains or as long as there are unresolved audit findings related to the record.

### **Sharing Information with Other Programs**

- School food authorities may disclose, without parent/guardian consent, participants' names and eligibility status (whether they are eligible for free meals or free milk or reduced-price meals) to persons directly connected with the administration or enforcement of federal education or state education programs.
- The attachment, Sharing Information with Other Programs, must be used when a school/district plans to use information from free and reduced-price applications for purposes other than evaluating eligibility for school meals or for programs authorized by the National School Lunch Act (42 USC 1758 (b)(2)(C)(iii)). A signature from the parent or legal guardian must be on file before the school/district can release any information from the application.

### **Special Milk Program**

- The Special Milk Program and Free School Milk Family Application materials can only be provided to students who do not have access to the School Breakfast Program (SBP) or National School Lunch Program (NSLP) (i.e., ½ day afternoon kindergarten). School food authorities may **not** claim the Special Milk Program for students who purchase/receive only milk when the SBP or NSLP is available.

### **Notification of Eligibility Determination**

- E-mail may be used as a method to notify households of their eligibility status. However, it is optional for households to provide an e-mail address and an application cannot be denied if the household does not provide an e-mail address. If a household does not provide an e-mail address or the e-mail address provided does not work, notification of approval/disapproval must be made in writing to the household. Confidentiality/disclosure of eligibility information regulations apply to e-mail of information on household applications.

### **Verification**

- Verification of eligibility for free and reduced-priced school meals *must* be done each year. The size of the sample is based on the number of approved family applications on file as of October 1, 2022. The deadline for completing Verification of Eligibility for School Meals is November 15, 2022. Verification activities and outcomes must be reported in the Michigan Nutrition Data System (MIND) 2.0 website by February 1, 2023.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/translated-applications>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/guidance-and-resources>