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SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAM APPLICATIONS ONLINE: Highlights of Ways to Reduce Access Barriers and Links to Available Materials

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Overview

In 2004, Congress reauthorized the school meals programs and enacted numerous changes to program rules regarding the application, enrollment, and eligibility verification processes. As a result of these changes, every school district in the country had to revise its school meals application for the 2005-2006 school year. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has reviewed state applications for 2005-2006 that are available online in order to identify examples of applications that not only comply with all program rules, but also are easy to use and understand.

Typically, parents complete school meals applications at home without assistance. In contrast to many other income-tested programs, there are no full-time caseworkers to help parents. Thus, if applications are complicated, ask unnecessary questions, or use language that might be perceived as threatening, parents could be deterred from successfully completing them, and eligible children could be left without an important nutrition benefit.

In addition, the few families whose applications are selected for verification — and who must therefore provide documentation of their children's eligibility — must be able to understand the verification process. For the process to work, parents must understand the kinds of documentation to provide, that their child's benefits are at stake if they do not respond, and that help is available if they need it.

This paper is intended as a resource for states and school districts that wish to review application and verification materials now in use. It is not a comprehensive guide to developing these materials; rather, it highlights some helpful examples from around the country. Fortunately, eligibility for the school meals program is relatively straightforward, making a user-friendly application an achievable goal for states and school districts.

The paper includes two sections. The first section identifies features of applications and related materials that are likely to enhance program access while complying with key federal requirements. The second section undertakes a similar review of verification materials. Appendix A provides links to each state's school meals program homepage and school meals forms (where available), as well as links to application materials for a sample of large local school districts. Appendices B and C

summarize all of the legally required elements of application and verification materials, respectively, including requirements adopted as part of the reauthorization legislation.

Application Materials

The packet of school meals materials provided to parents at the start of the school year typically includes a letter explaining the school meals program, instructions on how to complete an application for free or reduced-price meals, and an application form. (Appendix B summarizes all the required elements of application materials.) Since the burden of completing the application is primarily left to the parent, it is especially important for the materials to be clear, easy to use, and encouraging. If parents fail to complete and return the application form, their child must pay full price for school meals regardless of how needy the family is.¹

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s model application and related materials offer a sound starting point for school districts and state agencies that are looking for a model from which to work. Nine of the 39 states that have posted their application materials online adhere closely to the USDA model. States and districts may also find it useful to consider application materials actually in use in other places. Readers can access state web page addresses either by clicking on a state in the table below or by using the comprehensive state list in Appendix A.

Alabama	Georgia	Maryland	New Jersey	South Carolina
Alaska	Hawaii	Massachusetts	New Mexico	South Dakota
Arizona	Idaho	Michigan	New York	Tennessee
Arkansas	Illinois	Minnesota	North Carolina	Texas
California	Indiana	Mississippi	North Dakota	Utah
Colorado	Iowa	Missouri	Ohio	Vermont
Connecticut	Kansas	Montana	Oklahoma	Virginia
Delaware	Kentucky	Nebraska	Oregon	Washington
District of Columbia	Louisiana	Nevada	Pennsylvania	Wisconsin
Florida	Maine	New Hampshire	Rhode Island	Wyoming

Applications

Based on a review of USDA’s model application and the applications in use by various states and school districts, we have identified several ways in which materials can be made more user-friendly:

- *Use a clear and simple design.* The application form should be visually simple and self-explanatory. Such an approach supports the longstanding requirement that applications be “clear and simple in design.” (7 C.F.R. 245.6(a).) The USDA model application provides a good template. As an alternative, Colorado’s application uses formatting that conveys the sense that households do not have to provide an overwhelming amount of information. In addition, the Oregon and Seattle Public Schools applications use white space effectively to make the forms appear less wordy and more accessible.

¹ This is not true for households that are automatically enrolled for free meals as a result of direct certification that requires no action on the part of the household. In addition, school officials are permitted to complete an application on behalf of a household if they have information indicating that a household is eligible, but very few children are enrolled through this mechanism.

- *State clearly, before the income section of the application, that the household does not need to provide income information if it is receiving food stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance, or benefits through the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR).* Households that are eligible for free school meals because they receive benefits from one of the above programs do not have to provide income information on their application. Assembling income information is a burden for some households, so households that are exempt from this process should be made aware of that fact. School districts would benefit as well, since they would be relieved of the burden of receiving unnecessary income information, which can create opportunities for error.

The USDA model application states (above the space for case numbers) that if the family has filled in a case number, it should skip the income-reporting section. While most states' instruction pages outline which types of households should fill out which sections of the application, the exemptions are clearest if they are explained on the application itself, since many households are likely to read only the instructions embedded in the application.

- *Place the request for the signing adult's Social Security number in the income-information section.* Some adults without a Social Security number who are filling out a school meals application are members of households receiving food stamp, TANF, or FDPIR benefits. The application's design can influence their decision as to whether to apply.

Households that provide a food stamp/TANF/FDPIR case number are not required to provide a Social Security number for the adult signing the application (or an indication that the adult does not have one). However, most states follow the USDA model by asking for the Social Security number with the adult's signature at the bottom of the application. Parents in food stamp/TANF/FDPIR households may mistakenly believe that they have to provide a Social Security number. If they do not have a Social Security number or fear providing it, they may opt not to apply.

States can easily avoid this access barrier by including the Social Security number request as part of the household income-reporting section. Idaho, for example, asks for the adult's name, contact information, and signature in the first part of the application, and then asks for the adult's Social Security number in the section designated for households applying on the basis of income. Similarly, North Dakota asks for the adult's Social Security number as a part of the income-reporting section and directs food stamp, TANF, and foster-children households to skip this section.

- *State prominently on the application that the signing adult is not required to have a Social Security number.* The lack of a Social Security number is not grounds for ineligibility. It is important for adults who lack a Social Security number to understand that they may apply for free or reduced-price meals for the children in their household. Obscuring this fact poses a barrier to program participation by eligible children.

Program regulations state that applications based on income require *either* the Social Security number of the adult household member who signs the application *or* an indication that this adult does not possess a Social Security number. Yet some states, in violation of program

regulations, do not mention this second option in their application or the accompanying instructions. Other states mention this option in the instructions but not in the application itself; this does not violate program regulations, but many families likely complete the application without looking at the separate instructions.

There are several ways to address this issue on the application. The USDA model application provides a check-box labeled “I do not have a Social Security Number” next to the space for the Social Security number. Groups that work with immigrants report that some families are reluctant to draw attention to their lack of a Social Security number by checking the box. California and several other states include directions to write “none” in the space asking for the Social Security number. State officials may wish to consult with organizations representing various immigrant communities on which approach best suits immigrants in their state.

- *Have families list how often they receive different kinds of income rather than requiring them to convert all forms of income into a single frequency.* Households often have multiple sources of income that arrive at different frequencies — weekly or bi-weekly wages combined with monthly Social Security benefits, for example. Asking families to convert all of these sources into a single measure of income can be confusing. For example, many individuals may not understand that weekly income is converted to monthly income by multiplying by 4.33 because most assume there are 4 weeks in a month rather than 4.33 weeks. Requiring households to undertake conversion increases the burden of applying and creates opportunities for error.

School districts can improve program access and accuracy by doing the conversion calculations themselves rather than asking households to do them. (USDA recently issued guidance explaining the appropriate methodology for making conversion calculations; see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Application/2005-03-07.pdf>.) There are several ways states can gather the necessary information. The USDA model application provides spaces for households to fill in the income amount and how often the income was received, a technique adopted by many states and districts. Similarly, New York City provides a space for the amount of different types of income and then asks the household to fill in a code indicating whether it receives that amount weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, twice per month, or yearly. North Dakota provides a separate column for each type of pay period and asks the household to fill in the income received in the appropriate pay-period column.

Letters to Households and Application Instructions

The letter to households explaining the school meals programs and the application instructions varies greatly in length and complexity among states and districts, so this paper does not comment as extensively on its desirable features. In general, communication with households is most user-friendly if it is brief, simple, and clear. States and school districts would do well to test communications with individuals who are representative of the target audience.

Tone is also important. Program officials need to convey the importance of using accurate information on the application without unnecessarily frightening potential applicants. Applicants who do not understand what to do and are afraid that a mistake will result in some sort of investigation may simply fail to submit the form.

Many states have adopted the question-and-answer format of the USDA model letter, though some states have deleted certain questions or added new ones. For example, Iowa has added a question regarding other benefits families might be eligible for and a question regarding children with disabilities. Minnesota has added a question about whether children who receive free or reduced-price meals will be treated differently from other children and a question about whether any deductions from income are permitted.

USDA's model instruction page is divided by type of household and helps applicants identify which sections of the application they are required to complete. Some states have incorporated the instructions into the application itself rather than provide separate instructions. For example, North Dakota's application includes all of the instructions needed to complete it. Idaho's "modified" meal application combines a parent letter, instructions, and application form all on one double-sided sheet.

Verification Materials

Once applications have been processed, a small sample of applications is selected for eligibility verification, and these applicants are sent a verification notice requesting eligibility documentation. (Appendix C summarizes the required elements of the verification notice.) We were able to locate verification materials on the internet for 24 states. Six of these states used the USDA model verification materials with few or no changes.

A review of the materials in use by states that do not closely follow USDA's model shows that some states have not modified their verification materials to reflect the reauthorization law. Changes necessitated by the reauthorization law should be incorporated as soon as possible to bring the materials into compliance with program rules and to ensure that parents have accurate information about the verification process. Many eligible children lose free or reduced-price meals each year when their parents do not respond to the verification notice. Clear and comprehensible materials could encourage eligible families to comply with verification requests.

Based on a review of USDA's model verification materials and the materials in use by various states and school districts, we have identified several ways in which verification materials can be made more user-friendly:

- *Explain the timeframe for which information may be provided.* Households may provide documentation of their income for any period between the month prior to application and the present. (generally July or August through October or November). Households need to be informed that if their income has changed since the time they applied, they may provide documentation of their income at the time they applied or at any time since.

The USDA model verification notice addresses this issue in two places. First, the notice explains what kind of information to submit if the household was receiving food stamps or TANF cash assistance "when you applied for free or reduced price meals, or at any time since then. . . ." Second, when describing the kinds of documents that can be submitted to verify income, the notice states:

“Timeframe of Acceptable Income Documentation: Please submit papers that show your income at the time that you applied for benefits. If you do not have this information, you may submit papers from time of application up to time of verification.”

Minnesota has adopted a slight variation on this approach. After describing the kind of documents that may be used to verify eligibility (based on benefit receipt or income), the notice explains the timeframe:

“Send papers from last month or, at the earliest, the month before you applied for school meal benefits. If your income has increased or you are no longer approved for food stamps or MFIP [TANF cash assistance], send papers that show your income or that you received food stamps or MFIP benefits at the time you applied for school meal benefits. The same month must be used for all household members.”

- *Include a no-charge phone number for assistance and specify that it is cost-free to families.* The reauthorization legislation requires school districts to include in the verification notice to households a toll-free phone number that parents can call for help with the verification process. Although the posted verification notices generally included a blank in which a school district is expected to insert a phone number, the ones that did not follow USDA’s model did not specify that the number was toll-free.
- *Explain that documentation of homeless, runaway, or migrant status verifies eligibility.* Homeless, runaway, and migrant children are now categorically eligible for free meals and may be directly certified without having to complete an application. Children who are directly certified are not subject to verification.

Unfortunately, some such children are overlooked in the direct-certification process and complete an application, and a portion of this group is selected for verification. These families do not have to provide documentation of income or receipt of benefits to verify eligibility. Such families can be spared a substantial burden, or loss of benefits, if the district’s homeless liaison or migrant coordinator verifies the child’s status to school meal administrators.

Ideally, districts would first attempt to directly verify homeless, runaway, and migrant children without involving the household, by asking the homeless liaison and migrant coordinator whether any of the children selected for verification are homeless, runaway, or migrant.² For such children who are not directly verified, it is important that the verification notice explain to parents how to proceed if their child is homeless, runaway, or migrant. USDA’s model verification notice states, “If you get this letter for a homeless, migrant, or runaway child, please contact [school, homeless liaison, or migrant coordinator] for help.” Several states that posted their verification notice did not include any instructions regarding homeless, runaway, or migrant children. Without such instructions, families would have no way of knowing that they have an alternative to providing documentation of income or benefit receipt.

² For more information on direct verification, see *Reducing Paperwork And Connecting Low-Income Children With School Meals: Opportunities Under The New Child Nutrition Reauthorization Law*, Zoë Neuberger, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, November, 2004, pages 12-16, available at <http://www.cbpp.org/11-16-04fa.pdf>.

- *State prominently on the verification notice that households have the option of indicating that an adult in the household has no Social Security number.* Program regulations state that households selected for verification must provide *either* a Social Security number for each adult in the household *or* an indication that the adult does not have one. Immigrant families may be even more wary of providing information about their immigration status during the verification process (which may seem like an investigation into household eligibility) than during the application process. The verification notice may be less daunting to households in which an adult does not have a Social Security number if it explains clearly that an adult may indicate that he or she does not have a Social Security number.

Some verification notices include a place to list each adult member of the household and his or her Social Security number. Families may be more likely to complete such sections if the instructions explain clearly that the family may indicate that an adult does not have a Social Security number. USDA’s model verification notice includes a box next to the line for each adult household member labeled, “No Social Security Number.” Alternatively, households could be instructed to write “none” if the adult does not have a Social Security number.

- *Explain that households with no income can verify their eligibility by providing a note.* Some households are able to subsist for weeks or months with no household income by relying on friends and family for meals and shelter. These extremely poor families have no income to document and thus will face great difficulty documenting their eligibility for free meals. USDA’s model application explains that families with no income may provide a “brief note explaining how you provide food, clothing and housing for your household, and when you expect an income.” Unfortunately, some states that posted a verification notice omitted similar instructions for families with no income, which leaves extraordinarily vulnerable families in the dark about how to verify their eligibility for free school meals.

Conclusion

Over the next couple of years, states and school districts are likely to revise their application and verification materials as they continue to implement the changes to the school meals programs resulting from the reauthorization legislation and implementing regulations. These revisions will offer an important opportunity to conduct a more comprehensive review of the materials to assess whether they meet all program requirements, are understandable to all parents (including those with limited literacy or English skills), and are simple to complete. Fortunately, many states now post their applications and related materials online, which will make it easier for states and school districts to find models and features to incorporate into their own materials.

APPENDIX A: SCHOOL MEALS PROGRAM WEB SITES

USDA Model Application

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/>

Forms: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/FRP/frp.process.htm>

- For school year 2005-2006
- Application, parent letter, instructions, disclosure forms, verification notices

Translations: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/FRP/frp.process.htm> (Out-of-date applications)

- English, Cambodian, Chinese (Mandarin), Creole/Haitian, Croatian, French, Hindi, Hmong, Japanese, Korean, Laotian, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Somali, Thai, Urdu, Vietnamese
- Only English and Spanish applications are updated

Policy Memorandum:

http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Reauthorization_Policy_04/Reauthorization_04/Reauthorization_2004.htm

“Reauthorization Memoranda 2004”

State School Meals Information

Alabama

School Meals Homepage: <http://cnp.alsde.edu/> (Select “School Nutrition” from the left hand menu)

Forms: <http://cnp.alsde.edu/> (Select “School Nutrition,” → “Forms”)

- For School Year 2005-06
- USDA model application, parent letter, instructions, disclosure form, verification notice, and notification of approval/denial
- English and Spanish

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Alaska

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/cns/NSLP.html>

Forms: <http://www.eed.state.ak.us/tls/cns/nslp2.html>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, eligibility notification letter, notification for ending temporary approval, verification notice, disclosure form
- Sample Public Release

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Arizona

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.ade.state.az.us/health-safety/cnp/nslp/>

Forms: <http://www.ade.state.az.us/health-safety/cnp/nslp/parentforms/2005-2006/>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, parent letter, disclosure form, health insurance form
- English and Spanish

Policy Memorandum:

<http://www.ade.state.az.us/health-safety/cnp/nslp/Memos/Memos04-05/CN45-05.pdf>
“Reauthorization 2004: Changes Affecting Free- and Reduced-Price Certification Process”

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Arkansas

School Meals Homepage: <http://cnn.k12.ar.us/>

Forms: <http://cnn.k12.ar.us/What's%20New/Forms/Forms.htm> (click on “Complete Free and Reduced Price Meal Packet”)

- Application and instructions, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, notification of approval (Direct Certification), verification notice, and disclosure form
- Sample Public Release

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California

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/>

Forms: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sn/eligmaterials.asp>

- Flexible school year
- Application, letter to households, notification of expiration of temporary benefits, notification of approval/denial, notification of approval (Direct Certification), health care referral information
- Verification notice – COMING SOON (1/30/06)
- Sample Public Release
- English and Spanish

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Colorado

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdenutritran/nutriprograms.htm>

Forms: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdenutritran/download/word/FRPacket06a.doc>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application packet with application, instructions, parent letter, income criteria, notification of approval/denial, notification of approval (Direct Certification), disclosure form
- English and Spanish (*scroll to end of packet*)

Policy Memorandum:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdenutritran/download/pdf/FR%20Intro%20Letter%2006.pdf>

“2005-2006 Child Nutrition Programs Forms — Free and Reduced Price Meals”

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Connecticut

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/deps/nutrition/SchoolNutrIndex.htm>

Forms: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/deps/nutrition/Forms/Forms.html>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, parent letter, disclosure letter, notification of approval/denial, health insurance form
- USDA model packet in Spanish
- Sample Public Release

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Delaware

School Meals Homepage: <http://childnutrition.doe.state.de.us/childnutrition/lunchmenuupg.htm>

District of Columbia

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.k12.dc.us/dcps/services/student/student3.html>

Florida

School Meals Homepage: <http://fncm.doe.state.fl.us/main/html/nsl.html>

Forms:

<http://fncmnpwebprd.fldoe.org/floridaprd/FormDownload/FormDownloadMgr.asp?Mode=NSFD>

- For School Year 2005-06
- USDA model application, parent letter, notification of approval (Direct Certification), notification of approval/denial, verification notice, disclosure form

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Georgia

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/schools/nutrition/nutrition.asp>

Forms: <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/schools/nutrition/freepol.asp>

- For School Year 2005-06
- USDA model application, instructions, parent letter, verification notice, notification of eligibility determination, notification of approval (Direct Certification), disclosure form, Special Assistance Certification and Reimbursement Alternative letter
- Sample Public Release

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Hawaii

National School Lunch Program Homepage: <http://oahu-ces.hawaii.edu/OHCNP/lunch.html>

School Breakfast Homepage: <http://oahu-ces.hawaii.edu/OHCNP/breakfast.html>

Forms: <http://oahu-ces.hawaii.edu/OHCNP/lunch.html> (*under "Household Application Forms"*)

- Letter to households, instructions, verification notice, notification of approval/denial
- Sample Public Release

Idaho

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.sde.state.id.us/child/>

Forms: <http://www.sde.state.id.us/child/nslp-renewalforms.asp> (*under "Documents for Sponsor Use"*)

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, notification of approval/denial
- English and Spanish
- Sample Public Release

Illinois

School Meals Homepage: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/nutrition/htmls/national_school_lunch.htm

Forms: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/nutrition/htmls/household_eligibility.htm

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, disclosure form, health insurance flyer
- Link to USDA applications in 18 languages

Policy Memorandum: http://www.isbe.state.il.us/nutrition/pdf/wic_reauthorization.pdf

“Implementation Guidance for Reauthorization Changes”

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Indiana

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.doe.state.in.us/food/schoolnutrition/welcome.html>

Forms: <http://www.doe.state.in.us/food/schoolnutrition/cnpbenefitforms.html>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, parent letter, instructions, notification of approval/denial, notification of approval (Direct Certification), notification of temporary approval, disclosure form
- English and Spanish

Policy Memorandum: http://scnweb.doe.state.in.us/Nutrition/external_forms/SPFandRInfo.doc
“What’s new with Free and Reduced in 2005-06?”

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Iowa

School Meals Homepage: http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/fn/school_lunch/index.html

Forms: http://www.state.ia.us/educate/ecese/fn/school_lunch/res_admin.html

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, Medicaid information form, notification of approval/denial, waiver of confidentiality form, verification notice
- Sample Public Release

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Kansas

School Meals Homepage: http://www.ksde.org/kneat/SNP/SNPShell/snp_home_page.htm

Forms: http://www.ksde.org/kneat/SNP/SNPShell/snp_home_page.htm (select “Forms & Instructions” → “Program Renewal” → “School Nutrition Programs”)

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, letter to households, notification of approval/denial, waiver of confidentiality form

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Kentucky

National School Lunch Program Homepage: <https://kyeascn1.state.ky.us/nutrition/nslp.asp>

School Breakfast Homepage: <https://kyeascn1.state.ky.us/nutrition/sbp.asp>

Forms: <https://kyeascn1.state.ky.us/nutrition/nslp.asp> (scroll down page to “Forms”)

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, verification notice
- English and USDA model packet in Spanish and link to USDA application in 18 languages

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[Louisiana](#)

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/nutrition/453.html>

[Maine](#)

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.maine.gov/education/sfs/nslp.htm>

Forms: <http://www.maine.gov/education/forms/SchNutrition/Agree&Appl/agreeapplforms.htm>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, disclosure form
- English and French and link to USDA applications in 18 languages (Somali Packet links to USDA website)

Policy Statement for Free and Reduced Price Benefits:

<http://www.maine.gov/education/forms/SchNutrition/Agree&Appl/policystatef&benefits05.rtf>

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[Maryland](#)

School Meals Homepage:

http://www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/schoolnutrition/school_lunch.htm

[Massachusetts](#)

National School Lunch Program Homepage: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/programs/nslp.html>

School Breakfast Homepage: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/programs/sbp/>

Forms: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/programs/nslp.html>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Notification of approval/denial, verification notice, hearing procedure (*click on "2005-2006 Free and Reduced Price Meal Application Information" → scroll down to "Enclosure"*)

Forms: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/programs/sbp/resources.html>

- Parent letter, parent reminder flyer, utility discount flyer

Policy Memorandum: http://www.doe.mass.edu/cnp/free_red/05/

- Provides link to USDA prototype free and reduced meal application with additional comments for school food service directors

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Michigan

Nutrition Homepage: http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,1607,7-140-6530_6569_29919---,00.html

Forms: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/Family_App_Instructionsandform4458c023_32766_7.pdf

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, disclosure form
- Sample Public Release
- School Meals flyer: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/school_meals_fact_sheet_final_51835_7.pdf

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Minnesota

School Meals Homepage:

http://education.state.mn.us/mde/Learning_Support/Food_Nutrition_Services/School_Meal_Programs/index.html

Forms:

http://education.state.mn.us/mde/Learning_Support/Food_Nutrition_Services/School_Meal_Programs/Free_Reduced_Price_Meals/index.html

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, notification of approval (Direct Certification), verification notice
- English, Hmong, Khmer, Laotian, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Vietnamese
- Sample Media Release

Policy Memorandum: <http://education.state.mn.us/mde/static/004542.pdf>

“Summary of Reauthorization Provisions for School Nutrition Programs”

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Mississippi

National School Lunch Homepage: <http://www.cn.mde.k12.ms.us/cnprogs/nslp/default.htm>

School Breakfast Homepage: <http://www.cn.mde.k12.ms.us/cnprogs/nsbp/default.htm>

Forms: <http://www.cn.mde.k12.ms.us/resources/forms/MealApplication2004-05.pdf>

- For School Year 2004-05
- Instructions and parent letter

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Missouri

National School Lunch Homepage: http://dese.mo.gov/divadm/food/Lunch_Program.html

School Breakfast Homepage: http://dese.mo.gov/divadm/food/Breakfast_Program.html

Forms: http://dese.mo.gov/divadm/food/PDF/direct_cert05_06.pdf

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, direct certification eligibility letter, notification of approval/denial, disclosure form, health insurance form
- Link to USDA applications in 18 languages
- Sample Public Release

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Montana

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.opi.mt.gov/schoolfood/index.html>

Forms: <http://www.opi.mt.gov/schoolfood/nutritionpgms.html>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, letter to households, notification of change in eligibility letter, notification of approval (Direct Certification), notification results of verification eligibility letter, verification notice
- Sample Public Release

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Nebraska

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/NS/nslp/index.htm>

Forms: <http://www.nde.state.ne.us/NS/forms/nslpforms/freereducedapp.htm>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instruction, letter to households, approval/denial letter, disclosure form, verification notice, notice of change in benefit
- USDA model packet in Spanish and link to USDA application in 18 languages.

Nevada

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.doe.nv.gov/edteam/ndeoffices/schoolhealth/school.html>

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New Hampshire

School Meals Homepage:
<http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/doe/organization/programsupport/bnps.htm>

Forms: <http://www.ed.state.nh.us/education/doe/organization/programsupport/bnps/2005-2006schoolnutritionprogramappmaterials.htm>

- For School Year 2005-06
- USDA model application, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, disclosure forms, special dietary needs form, hearing procedures

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New Jersey

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/markets/schnutrprg.htm>

School Lunch Homepage: <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/markets/natschlunch.htm>

School Breakfast Homepage: <http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/markets/schbrkftprg.htm>

[New Mexico](#)

National School Lunch Homepage: <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/sipds/snp/lunch.html>

School Breakfast Homepage: <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/sipds/snp/breakfast.html>

Forms: <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/div/sipds/snp/forms.html>

- For School Year 2003-04
- Application, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, verification notice (*Household materials begin on Page 18 of PDF file*)
- Sample Public Release
- English and Spanish

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[New York](#)

Child Nutrition Homepage:

http://portal.nysed.gov/portal/page?_pageid=74,1&_dad=pref&_schema=PORTAL30

Forms:

<http://portal.nysed.gov/pls/pref/docs/PAGE/CNKC/ELIGIBILITY/POLICY%20BOOKLET%202005-06.HTM> (*Household materials begin on Page 35*)

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letters, parent letter for children with disabilities, notification of approval/denial, notification of approval (Direct Certification), notification of change in eligibility, temporary approval letter, verification notice, disclosure form
- English, Spanish and Yiddish

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[North Carolina](#)

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/childnutrition/nutritionprograms/>

Forms (site not yet operational): <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/childnutrition/applications/>

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[North Dakota](#)

National School Lunch Homepage: <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/child/snp/nslp/index.shtm>

School Breakfast Homepage: <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/child/snp/sbp/index.shtm>

Forms: <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/child/snp/tools/index.shtm>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, letter to households, notification of approval/denial, notification of change in benefit, medical statement for student in allergies, disclosure form, verification notice

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Ohio

School Meals Homepage: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/food_service/NSLP/default.asp

Forms: http://www.ode.state.oh.us/food_service/nslp/cns_school_downloadable_documents.asp

- For School Year 2005-06
- USDA model application, notification of approval/denial, verification package, notification of predetermined eligibility, disclosure form
- Link to USDA applications in 18 languages
- Sample Public Release

Oklahoma

School Meals Homepage: http://www.sde.state.ok.us/cnp/cnp_food.html

School Lunch Homepage: http://www.sde.state.ok.us/cnp/cnp_nslp.html

School Breakfast Homepage: http://www.sde.state.ok.us/cnp/cnp_nsbp.html

Forms: http://www.sde.state.ok.us/cnp/cnp_doc.html (click on "Policy Statement/Attachments")

- Flexible school year
- Application, instructions, parent letter, notice of approval/denial, verification notice
- Sample Public Release

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Oregon

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=207>

Forms: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/services/nutrition/nslp/lunch/>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, verification notice, disclosure form
- English, Spanish, Russian, and Vietnamese

Pennsylvania

School Meals Homepage:

http://www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition/cwp/view.asp?a=5&Q=58628&food_nutritionNav=|3285|

School Lunch Homepage:

http://www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition/cwp/view.asp?a=5&Q=45622&food_nutritionNav=|3296|&food_nutritionNav=|4098|3285|

School Breakfast Homepage:

http://www.pde.state.pa.us/food_nutrition/cwp/view.asp?a=5&Q=58684&food_nutritionNav=|3298|&food_nutritionNav=|4098|3285|

Forms: <http://www.pears.ed.state.pa.us/AppPacDownload.asp?ProgramGrpId=NSLP>

- For School Year 2005-06
- USDA model application, instructions, parent letter, disclosure forms, special medical and dietary needs form

Training Materials: http://nutrition.hhdev.psu.edu/projectpa/frames_html/frames_homepage.html

“Changes in Child Nutrition Program Law and Regulations”

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[Rhode Island](#)

School Meals Homepage: http://www.ridoe.net/child_family/nutrition/default.htm

[South Carolina](#)

National School Lunch Homepage: <http://www.myschools.com/offices/sfsn/pages/nslp.htm>

School Breakfast Homepage: <http://www.myschools.com/offices/sfsn/pages/sbp.htm>

Forms: <http://www.myschools.com/offices/sfsn/pages/formsindex.htm>

- Flexible school year
- Application, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, verification notice, notification of approval (Direct Certification), waiver of confidentiality
- Sample Public Release

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[South Dakota](#)

School Meals Homepage: <http://doe.sd.gov/oess/cans/nslp/index.asp>

Forms: <http://doe.sd.gov/oess/cans/nslp/applications.asp> (click on "Attachments Section pages" under "2005-06 Renewal Agencies")

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, notification of approval/denial
- Sample Public Release

[Tennessee](#)

School Meals Homepage: <http://snp.state.tn.us/tndoe/> (Select "Tennessee SNP" on top menu)

Forms: <http://snp.state.tn.us/tndoe/> (Select "Tennessee SNP" on top menu, → "SY 2006 Start-Up")

- Provides link to registration package for starter application
- For School Year 2005-06
- USDA model application, parent letter, notification of predetermined eligibility, disclosure form, verification notice
- Sample Public Release
- Link to USDA applications in 18 languages

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Texas

School Meals Homepage:

http://www.squaremeals.org/fn/render/parent/channel/0,1253,2348_2362_0_0,00.html

Forms: http://www.squaremeals.org/fn/render/channel/items/0,1249,2348_2439_0_0,00.html

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, notification of predetermined eligibility (migrant and Direct Certification), verification notice
- Sample Public Release
- English and Spanish

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Utah

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us/cnp/cnp%20programs.htm>

Vermont

School Meals Homepage: http://www.state.vt.us/educ/new/html/pgm_nutrition.html

Forms: http://www.state.vt.us/educ/nutrition/forms_pub/fp.htm

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instruction, parent letters, notification approval/denial, return of Direct Certification letter, verification notice

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Virginia

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Finance/Nutrition/programs.html>

Forms: <http://www.pen.k12.va.us/VDOE/Finance/Nutrition/resources.html>

- Contact information for regional specialists

Washington

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.k12.wa.us/ChildNutrition/NSLSBP.aspx>

Forms: <http://www.k12.wa.us/ChildNutrition/NSLSBP.aspx>

- For School Year 2005-06
- USDA model application, parent letter, notification of approval/denial, notification of approval (Direct Certification), verification notice
- Sample Public Release

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Wisconsin

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/fns/nslp1.html>

Forms: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/fns/fincou1.html>

- For School Year 2005-06
- USDA model application, parent letter, verification materials, notification of predetermined eligibility, notification of approval (Direct Certification), verification notice, disclosure form
- Sample Public Release

Wyoming

School Health and Safety Homepage: <http://www.k12.wy.us/hs.asp> (click on "School Lunch and Breakfast")

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Selected School Districts' School Meals Information (Alphabetically by State)

Los Angeles Unified, CA

School Meals Homepage: <http://cafe-la.lausd.k12.ca.us/>

Forms: <http://cafe-la.lausd.k12.ca.us/MEALAPP.HTM>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, letter to household
- English, Spanish, Armenian, Russian, Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese

Dade County School District, Miami, FL

Meals page: <http://nutrition.dadeschools.net/freereduced.html>

School Lunch Homepage: <http://nutrition.dadeschools.net/lunchpgm.html>

School Breakfast Homepage: <http://nutrition.dadeschools.net/brkfstpgm.html>

Forms: <http://nutrition.dadeschools.net/documents.asp>

- Verification change benefit letter, sibling change of meal benefits

Duval County School District, Jacksonville, FL

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.educationcentral.org/schools/htmeals.asp>

Forms: <http://www.educationcentral.org/schools/htmeals.asp> (scroll down to the bottom of the page to "National School Lunch Program")

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, parent letter, instructions

Hillsborough County School District, Tampa, FL

School Meals Homepage: <http://apps.sdhc.k12.fl.us/SNS/index.asp>

Forms: <http://apps.sdhc.k12.fl.us/SNS/docs/school%20appletter.pdf>

- Parent letter, instructions

Palm Beach County School District, FL

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.palmbeach.k12.fl.us/sfs/parent/>

Forms

- English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Creole

Cobb County, Marietta, GA

School Nutrition Information:

http://www.cobb.k12.ga.us/departments/bs/bsfoodservices/free_reduced/free_reduced_home.htm

Forms: http://www.cobb.k12.ga.us/departments/bs/bsfoodservices/free_reduced/free_reduced_home.htm

(click "Application Form - English" for application and click "How to fill out application – English" for instructions)

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions
- Spanish

Montgomery County Public Schools, MD

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/foodserv/farms/intro.shtm>

- FAQs *(click "FAQ" under "Free and Reduced Price Meals Information" on a link to the left)*

Forms: <http://www.mcps.k12.md.us/departments/forms/pdf/240-30.pdf>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter
- Instructions in Cambodian, Chinese, French, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese

Prince Georges County Public Schools, MD

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.pgcps.org/~lunch/index.html>

Forms: <http://www.pgcps.org/~lunch/application.htm>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, letter to household, instructions
- Letter to household in Spanish
- Press Release:
http://www.pgcps.org/~outreach/webdocs/previousrelease_july04_nationalschooll/nationalschooll.pdf

Clark County School District, Las Vegas, NV

School Meals Homepage: <http://ccsd.net/foodservice/>

School Lunch Program Homepage: <http://ccsd.net/foodservice/1-NSLP.htm>

Forms: <http://ccsd.net/foodservice/2-FreeReduced.htm>

- Instructions

New York City Department of Education, NY

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.opt-osfns.org/osfns/meals/default.aspx>

Forms: http://www.opt-osfns.org/osfns/meals/form_reduced_eng.aspx

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter
- English, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, French, Greek, Haitian-Creole, Hebrew, Italian, Korean, Russian, Hindi, Polish, Urdu

Portland School District, OR

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/nutrition/webwelcm.php>

Forms: <http://www.pps.k12.or.us/depts/nutrition/parents.php>

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter, disclosure form
- English, Spanish, and Russian (Vietnamese translations can be obtained by calling)

Philadelphia City School District, PA

School Meals Homepage: <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/foodservices/aboutus.html>

Forms: <http://www.phila.k12.pa.us/offices/foodservices/programs.html> (click "Confidential Applications for Free/ Reduced Price Meals" → click "download sample application")

- For School Year 2003-04
- Application, parent letter

Fairfax County Public Schools, VA

School Meals Homepage: http://www.fcps.edu/fs/food/food_at_school/free_reduced/

Forms: http://www.fcps.edu/fs/food/food_at_school/free_reduced/ (scroll down to the bottom of the page)

- For School Year 2005-06
- Application, instructions, parent letter

APPENDIX B: REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF APPLICATION MATERIALS

Information to be Contained in Letter or Notice to Households Distributed at the Beginning of School Year Under Program Regulations (7 C.F.R. 245.5(a)(1))

- In schools participating in a meal service program, the eligibility criteria for *reduced price* benefits with an explanation that household with incomes less than or equal to the reduced price criteria would be eligible for either free or reduced price meals.
- How a household may make application for free or reduced price meals or for free milk for its children (free milk may be offered by schools that do not operate a federal lunch program).
- An explanation that an application for free or reduced price benefits on the basis of income and household size cannot be approved unless it contains:
 - names of all household members;
 - income received by each household member, identified by source of the income;
 - the signature of an adult household member; and
 - the Social Security number of the adult household member who signs the application or an indication that he/she does not possess a Social Security number.
- An explanation that households with children who are members of currently certified food stamp, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance, or Food Distribution on Indian Reservations Program (FDPIR) households may submit applications for these children with abbreviated information:
 - the child's name and appropriate food stamp or TANF case number or FDPIR case number or other identifier and
 - signature of an adult household member.
- An explanation that the information on the application may be verified at any time during the school year.
- How a household may apply for benefits at any time during the school year as circumstances change.
- A statement to the effect that children having parents or guardians who become unemployed are eligible for free or reduced price meals or for free milk during the period of unemployment, provided that the loss of income causes the household income during the period of unemployment to be within the eligibility criteria.
- A statement to the effect that in certain cases foster children are eligible for free or reduced price meals or free milk regardless of the income of the household with whom they reside and that households wishing to apply for such benefits for foster children should contact the school district.
- The statement: "In the operation of child feeding programs, no child will be discriminated against because of race, sex, color, national origin, age or disability."
- How a household may appeal the decision of the school district with respect to the application under the hearing procedure set forth in 7 C.F.R. § 245.7.

- The letter or notice shall be accompanied by a copy of the application form required under 7 C.F.R. § 245.6.

Specifications Regarding Free and Reduced-Price School Meal Applications Under Program Regulations (7 C.F.R. § 245.6(a))

- The application shall be clear and simple in design.
- The information requested on the application shall be limited to that required to demonstrate whether the family meets the eligibility criteria for free or reduced price meals.

Information that Must be Requested on Free and Reduced-Price School Meal Applications Under Program Regulations (7 C.F.R. § 245.6(a))

- Names of all household members.
- Income received by each member (identified by household member who received the income).
- Source of income.
- Social Security number of adult household member who signs application or indication that the adult does not have a Social Security number.
- Food stamp, FDPIR, or TANF case number in lieu of names of all household members, household income information, and Social Security number or indication that the adult has none.
- Signature of adult family member.

Free and Reduced-Price School Meal Applications Must also Include Substantially the Following Statements Under Program Regulations (7 C.F.R. § 245.6(a))

- “Unless you include your child’s case number for the Food Stamp Program, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (or other identifier for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations) or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, you must include the social security number of the adult household member signing the application or indicate that the household member does not have a social security number. This is required by Section 9 of the National School Lunch Act. The social security number is not mandatory, but the application cannot be approved if a social security number is not given or an indication is not made that the signer does not have a social security number. The social security number will be used in the administration and enforcement of the program.”
- “In certain cases foster children are eligible for free or reduced price meals or free milk regardless of your household income. If you have such children living with you and wish to apply for such meals or milk for them, please contact us.”
- The application shall also include a statement, immediately above the space for signature, that the person signing the application certifies that all information furnished in the application is true and correct, that the application is being made in connection with the receipt of Federal funds, that school officials may verify the information on the application, and that deliberate misrepresentation

of the information may subject the applicant to prosecution under applicable State and Federal criminal statutes.

Changes Needed to Application Materials Resulting from Reauthorization

As a result of new provisions included in the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (P.L. 108-265), certain changes had to be made to application materials. USDA has implemented these provisions through guidance, but has not yet issued regulations. USDA's guidance summarizing application changes resulting from the reauthorization legislation is available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Application/2005-03-07.pdf>. More detailed guidance on specific provisions is cited below.

- Eligibility now lasts for the full school year. As a result, parents are no longer required to inform the school district of any changes in their household circumstances that might affect their child's eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals. Applications and related materials — including instructions and introductory web pages — may no longer include any mention of reporting changes in household income, family composition, or receipt of benefits. (While school districts may not ask households that have been approved for free or reduced-price meals to provide updated information about their circumstances, they must accept applications throughout the year. School districts are required to communicate to parents that the school welcomes new applications at any time during the year, and may wish to especially encourage applications from families who feel they may newly qualify.) USDA has issued initial guidance regarding this provisions which is available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Reauthorization_Policy_04/Reauthorization_04/2004-07-07.pdf and http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Reauthorization_Policy_04/Reauthorization_04/2004-08-25.pdf.
- Application materials (though not necessarily the application itself) must contain a notification that children living in households receiving benefits through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Food Stamp Program, the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant may be eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
- Communications with households regarding the certification process must be "in an understandable and uniform format and, to the maximum extent practicable, in a language that parents and legal guardians can understand." (Section 9(b)(8) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(8)).) The legislation clarified and emphasized the requirement that eligibility-related materials must be comprehensible to adults with a wide range of language and literacy skills. USDA has issued initial guidance regarding this provision (available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2005-12-23.pdf>).
- A single household application must be accepted for all children in the same household attending schools administered by a single local education agency (school district).
- Electronic applications (with electronic signatures) may be accepted.

APPENDIX C: REQUIRED ELEMENTS OF VERIFICATION MATERIALS

Information Required to be Provided to Households Selected for Verification Under Program Regulations (7 C.F.R. 245.6a(a)(ii))

- Written notice that their application has been selected for verification and that the household is required to provide the requested verification information by a specified date.
- An explanation of the types of information and/or documents that are required to confirm eligibility for free or reduced price meals.
- The name and no-charge phone number of a school official who can assist in the verification effort.
- An explanation that:
 - In lieu of any information that would otherwise be required, the household can submit proof of current food stamp, FDPIR, or TANF certification to verify the eligibility of a child who is a member of a food stamp, FDPIR, or TANF household;
 - Unless the household provides a food stamps, TANF, or FDPIR case number, information provided to the local educational agency must include the Social Security number of each adult household member or an indication that the adult does not have a Social Security number;
 - Provision of a Social Security number is not mandatory but if neither a Social Security number or an indication that the adult does not have one is provided, free or reduced price meal benefits will be terminated; and
 - The Social Security numbers provided may be used to identify households members in carrying out efforts to verify the correctness of information stated on the application and continued eligibility for the program.
- An explanation that verification efforts may be carried out through program reviews, audits, and investigations and may include contacting a food stamp, FDPIR, or TANF office to determine current certification for receipt of these benefits, contacting employers to determine income, contacting the State employment security office to determine the amount of benefits received and checking documentation produced by household members to prove the amount of income received.
- An explanation that failure to cooperate with the verification efforts will result in termination of benefits.

Changes Needed to Verification Materials Resulting from Reauthorization

- Verification materials must explain that documentation of eligibility may be provided for any point in time between the month prior to the original application and the time the household is required to provide documentation.
- Homeless, runaway, and migrant children are now categorically eligible for free meals. Therefore documentation of a child as having such status is sufficient to verify eligibility. Households need to be informed that documentation of such status is sufficient to verify eligibility in lieu of providing documentation of income or benefit receipt.

- School districts must include in the verification notice to households a toll-free phone number that parents can call for assistance with the verification process. USDA has issued guidance specifying that the district may establish a toll-free number or allow households to reverse the charges if they are outside the local calling area (available at http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Reauthorization_Policy_04//Reauthorization_04/2005-03-10.pdf).
- Communications with households regarding the verification process must be "in an understandable and uniform format and, to the maximum extent practicable, in a language that parents and legal guardians can understand." (Section 9(b)(8) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(8)).) The legislation clarified and emphasized the requirement that eligibility-related materials must be comprehensible to adults with a wide range of language and literacy skills. USDA has issued initial guidance regarding this provision (available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2005-12-23.pdf> and <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Governance/Policy-Memos/2006-03-02.pdf>).