

Checklist of Key Features of School Meals Application Materials to Improve Program Access

Provide materials in a language and at a level that parents can understand by

- Identifying the primary language of each household
- Conducting all communications in the household's primary language by providing written and oral translations of all eligibility-related communication, including verification materials
- Using language that parents with limited literacy can understand and providing application assistance

Simplify applications for categorically eligible children by

- Providing in the direct certification notice instructions to parents about how to make other children in the household known to the school district
- Requesting only one case number, clearly describing which number to use, and explaining that it can be for SNAP, TANF cash assistance, or FDPIR
- Not requesting unnecessary information (income information for adults or children or information about a Social Security number) from households that receive assistance
- Omitting from online applications the request for income information or information about a Social Security number if the household has provided a SNAP/TANF cash assistance/FDPIR case number or is applying only for foster children
- Clearly conveying that children in foster care are categorically eligible for free meals
- Making applications consistent with policies for children in foster care
- Explaining the process and consequences of including children in foster care as members of the household
- Stating in the parent letter that homeless, migrant, and runaway children qualify for free meals
- Clearly explaining the steps parents need to take if their children have not been directly certified and they believe they are homeless, migrant, or runaway

Reduce math errors by

- Providing options on the application to note different frequencies of income without doing calculations

Encourage families that may be eligible to apply by stating clearly on the website and application

- That a household may apply for benefits at any time during the school year
- That children of parents who become unemployed may become eligible for free or reduced-price meals
- That a single application will be accepted for all children in the household attending schools in the same district
- That household members do not have to be U.S. citizens for children to qualify for free or reduced-price meals
- The required non-discrimination statement
- The income eligibility limit for reduced-price meals

Encourage eligible families selected for verification to respond by including in the verification notice

- A toll-free number for assistance and an explanation that families will not be charged
- Clarification that documentation may be provided for any point in time between the month prior to application and the time of verification
- Instructions about how households with homeless, runaway, or migrant children can verify their eligibility
- Instructions about how households with no income can verify their eligibility
- No requests for information about Social Security numbers