



## WISCONSIN SCHOOL NUTRITION **IN A NUTSHELL**

# Overview In Determining Free and Reduced Price Meal Eligibility

All School Food Authorities (SFAs) participating in the NSLP and SBP are required to provide free and reduced meals to eligible students as outlined in 7 CFR 245.10(a). This document provides an overview of the process of certifying students for free and reduced meal benefits.

### Resources

#### Important Weblinks

- [Free and Reduced Price Webpage](#)
- [Free and Reduced Meal Applications](#)
- [Direct Certification Webpage](#)
- [Free, Reduced and Verification Online Learning](#)
- [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#) provides a comprehensive review of federal requirements, policies, and procedures for establishing eligibility.
- [Calendar of Program Requirements](#)

## Requirements for Determining Meal Benefits

### Public Release:

- SFAs participating in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs are required to annually provide the Public Release to a variety of community organizations including local news media, grassroots organizations, and the local unemployment office, at the beginning of the school year to inform potentially eligible persons that your school or agency participates in the Child Nutrition Programs and includes information pertaining to eligibility, benefits and services and the steps needed to participate.
- Maintain documentation of where the public release was sent.
- The public release should not be distributed to households or posted on the SFA's website.

### Run Direct Certification (DC):

- User rights must be requested from DPI for Direct Certification Program access.
- A minimum of four DC runs are required each year after July 1st.
  - 1st: beginning of the school year (between July 1 and the first day of school)
  - 2nd: three months after the first run (between October and December)
  - 3rd: six months after the first run (between January and March)
  - 4th: between March 15 and April 1 (for CEP notification report)
- DC eligibility codes determine free and reduced-price meal benefits.
  - DC codes that certify a free meal benefit: S, O, T, M, G, or E
  - Z code certifies a reduce-price meal benefit
  - No meal benefits are matched if an N code is displayed.
- The effective date of eligibility for students matched on DC is the date of the DC run.
- Once a student is matched on DC, they retain their meal benefit for the entire school year.

### Paper Applications:

- After July 1st, distribute the current school year application packet to households including:
  - Parent/Guardian Information Letter/Frequently Asked Questions
  - Free and Reduced Meal Application
  - Instructions/How to Apply

### Electronic Applications:

- If utilizing online applications, software must be approved by DPI before SFAs can post the link to online applications for households.
  - Refer to the list of approved online applications on the Free and Reduced Meal Application webpage.
- Update software at least annually, as applicable, to include current guidelines.

### Determining Applications:

- Applications need to be determined within **10 operating/school days** of receipt.
- Students are certified for meal benefits beginning on the date when the application is approved.
  - Per [SP11 CACFP06 SFSP11-2014](#) SFAs may request flexibility to the effective eligibility date with prior state agency approval.
  - Contact [MealEligibility@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:MealEligibility@dpi.wi.gov) for more information on this.
- Use the current income eligibility guidelines (IEGs) to determine the eligibility status of applications.
  - The income eligibility guidelines are updated annually and posted after July 1.

### Household Notifications:

- Notify households of benefit eligibility from direct certification, application, or other source eligibility.
- Compliant template notification letters are on the DPI website.

### Extension of Benefits/Joint Custody:

- When students match via direct certification, benefits can extend to other members in the same household or in a second household where joint custody is established.
- All direct certification codes may extend except E (foster status).
- Benefits from a household application do not extend in a joint custody situation.
- On a Free and Reduced Meal Application, if any of the following boxes are checked: *foster, migrant, homeless, or runaway* the benefit does not extend to other members in the household.

### Benefit Issuance (BI) List:

- Maintain a list of students that qualify for free/reduced price meal or milk benefits for the current school year.
- Update as needed due to changes in student eligibility throughout the school year and after carryover period.
- Electronic BI lists should be reviewed after the carryover period ends. Effective dates must be for the current school year only. Check with the software company to correctly export this report.

### **Carry Over:**

- Student eligibility status from the previous school year is carried over into the current school year for up to 30 operating (school) days or until a new eligibility status is determined, whichever comes first.
- A N code on DC is not considered a new determination.

### **Disclosure/Sharing of Information:**

- Schools must seek written consent from the household guardian to use information provided on applications for purposes outside of the School Meal Programs. See the Eligibility Manual for further guidance.
- Any program or person receiving eligibility information must have a legitimate “need to know” to provide a service or carry out an authorized activity.
- Template sharing of information and disclosure agreements are available for SFAs on the Free & Reduced Meal Eligibility Webpage

### **Appeals:**

- A household may appeal the eligibility determination.
- Hearing Official oversees the appeal process according to proper procedures.
- Meal/milk benefits remain in effect until the appeal process is completed.

## **Designate the Officials**

- The Determining and Confirming Officials cannot be the same person.
- The Hearing Official cannot be the same person as any of the other officials listed in the contract.
- The officials are noted in the online school nutrition application.

### **Determining Official**

- This person is responsible for processing meal applications and running Direct Certification.

### **Confirming Official:**

- This person is responsible for completing the confirming review for the applications selected for verification.

### **Verifying Official:**

- This person is responsible for completing the verification process.

### **Hearing Official:**

- This is typically a person of high authority, outside of the School Meal Program that hears complaints relating to meal eligibility determinations.