

FREE AND REDUCED APPLICATIONS

Frequently Asked Questions – 2007-2008

(Q1) How often must a family submit an application to be approved for Free or Reduced meals?

A NEW application must be submitted each school year. Applications are valid for only the school year in which they were submitted.

(Q2) Can a student receive free or reduced meals before their application is submitted and approved?

No. All students are required to pay the full price for meals until they have an approved application on file.

(Q3) Do children from families approved for free or reduced meals the last school year have to pay for their meals when school starts until they have an approved application on file?

No. Children from families who were approved for free and reduced last year have a 30 school day grace period at the beginning of each school year to submit their new application. These children will be temporarily free or reduced until either a new application is approved or through the 30th day if no application is submitted. On the eve of the 30th day, families that do not re-submit a current year application will “roll back” to full pay status. This year’s date is the evening of Oct. 17, 2007.

(Q4) If a family was approved last year misses the cut off date to re-submit for the new school year, can they still submit an application after that date?

Yes. Families can submit an application after the cut off date. They will be responsible for the full price of any meals eaten during that transition time.

(Q5) We have copies of the previous year’s application forms left over from last year. Can we hand those out to parents for this year?

No. Previous school year applications must be disposed of. An application submitted must be on the form printed for the current school year. Applications submitted on previous years forms can not be accepted by federal regulation.

(Q6) How does a family get a copy of a new application form?

Application forms for each new school year are mailed to all households late July or the first week in August. Blank applications will also be sent to all school offices and the enrollment centers. In addition, the lunchroom manager in each school will also have copies available. Forms will also be available on the Nutrition Services web page at:

<http://seattleschools.org/area/nutrition-svc/index>

(Q7) When do applications have to be turned in?

Applications must be turned in and approved before a student can receive free or reduced meals. Students will be expected to pay for meals until their application has been turned in, reviewed and approved. Applications are mailed in the summer before school starts to allow families the opportunity to submit their family application before school starts.

(Q8) Are translated versions of the application form available for families?

YES. Again this year, the application has been translated into the top TEN languages reported for the District. Households who indicated a language preference when enrolling their students were sent a translated copy of the application form along with the English version application. Copies of the translated forms can be downloaded on line at:

<http://seattleschools.org/area/nutrition-svc/index>

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(Q9) Will the applications be pre-approved by the lunchroom managers?

NO. Just as last year all applications will be processed only by staff in the Nutrition Services Main Office. This will reduce the amount of paper work the individual school managers will have to handle at the start of the school year. This will allow additional time to work with students to submit a new application and help them to learn and enjoy the benefits provided by their school lunchroom.

(Q10) How long will it take to process and approve applications through the Nutrition Services Office?

Our goal is to process the applications as quickly as possible so students who qualify for free or reduced meals can receive this benefit. Once school starts, applications are **usually** processed within 5 working days or less, which is half of the time allowed by the USDA to review and post an approved application. Most of our applications are promptly processed provided parents or guardians correctly complete the application.

(Q11) How can a family be assured that if their children qualify for free or reduced meals, they will be able to receive those meals the first day of school and not have to pay for them?

The best way is to submit applications in advance of the start of the school year. Applications are being processed by the Nutrition Services Administrative Office as of the 1st of August. Parents do not have to wait until the 1st day of school to turn in their forms. Forms have been mailed to all families by the end of July or first of August with a self addressed stamped return envelope to help expedite the process. Forms sent to the schools can be forwarded immediately to Nutrition Services Administrative Office.

(Q12) Once a family is approved for free or reduced meals, are they entitled to those meals for the whole school year?

Yes. The approved meal eligibility remains the same for the whole school year unless the family is selected to participate in the verification process and their eligibility changes after reviewing their verified income to the original application. (see Q16).

(Q13) If a child has been approved for free and reduced meals and transfers to another school within the Seattle Public Schools, do they have to fill out another application?

No. The eligibility will transfer to the other school within the district.

(Q14) Does the eligibility transfer right away?

Generally this will take a few days. If the school from which the student leaves removes them from their enrollment data base and the new school they are attending has them enrolled in their data base the transfer is timely. If one or both of these steps do not happen, the student will not appear in their new lunchroom's data base. The Lunchroom Manager will need to call Nutrition Services Administrative Office for the eligibility status of the student.

(Q15) If a child transfers to the Seattle Public Schools and was approved for free or reduced meals in their previous school district, are they required to fill out another application form?

No. Approvals for free and reduced meals can transfer between school districts. Nutrition Services Administrative Office Staff will call the previous school district and request a faxed copy of the application. Either the school office staff or the Lunchroom Manager will need to notify Nutrition Service office staff with name of the student and school district he/she transferred from.

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(Q16) Is Nutrition Services required to verify the eligibility of applications for free or reduced meals?

Yes. Federal regulations require that all school districts RANDOMLY select and verify the income information on approved applications on file as of September 30th of each year. If the verified income information does not match the initial application, the eligibility will be changed to the correct status. If eligibility decreases, the family is given a 10 day grace period before their students' eligibility changes. If the eligibility increases, the new eligibility goes into effect immediately.

(Q17) Is eligibility information confidential?

Yes. It can only be released with the proper authorization. There is both a fine and a jail sentence for release of information that is not authorized either by the parent/guardian.

(Q18) Are there any benefits to parents who choose to have eligibility information released?

Yes. By checking the box and signing the signature line on the bottom of the F&R application (#5 – Other Benefits), parents grant school officials permission to use the information provided on their application to determine other school benefits their child(ren) may be eligible for. ONLY a parent or legal guardian may sign this waiver of confidentiality. One example of other school benefits is services provided for students in the Running Start Program, Pay for K, college testing, AP testing, athletic fees, event fees, field trips, ASB Fee, etc.

(Q19) What is meant by Direct Certification?

Direct Certification is a process where families certified by the Department of Social and Health Services as receiving benefits from basic food (formerly Food Stamps), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) as of July 1, 2006, are automatically approved for receiving free meals. Data on families approved for free meals based on their certification by DSHS, is transmitted to Nutrition Services through the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Families whose children are entered by Direct Certification do not have to complete an application for free and reduced meals. New families are downloaded from DSHS monthly.

(Q20) Can a school building principal complete an application for a student?

Yes. By federal regulation, a principal or a counselor, can complete an application for a student known to be eligible if the household fails to apply. When exercising this option, you must complete the application on behalf of the student based on the best household size and income information. The source of the information must be noted on the application or can be noted by attaching a letter on district letterhead stating the source of information. Names of household members, social security number, and signature of an adult household member need not be secured. The principal or counselor signs the application. Nutrition Service will notify the household that the student has been certified and is receiving free or reduced price benefits. This option is intended for limited use in individual situations.