



Eligibility for Free or Reduced-Price School Meals During the Shutdown

Families can apply for free or reduced-price school meals at any point during the school year. This is a long-standing rule to reflect the many changes in families' economic circumstances that can occur. This practice applies to households with furloughed employees. *To apply, families should contact their school nutrition department.*

Background

Eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals is based upon annual income; yet, families who have a change in income at any point during the school year can apply for free or reduced-price school meals. School districts may urge families who have become eligible for free or reduced-price school meals due to being furloughed to terminate their free or reduced-price eligibility status once the economic hardship has changed. Districts also may inform families that some school meal applications are verified, and they may ask the applicant to produce documentation of their income for the application month.

Flexibility in the Date of Eligibility

School districts have the flexibility to date the eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals as of the date of the application (rather than the later date on which they approve the application) to provide more immediate support to families. In order for a school district to implement this option, it must be consistently applied to all applications and communicated to the state child nutrition agency.

This flexibility creates an important opportunity for school districts to support their students and their school nutrition finances. It increases the speed with which eligible students receive free or reduced-price school meal benefits so they are not sitting in a classroom hungry and unable to concentrate. It also keeps families from accruing school meal debt while the application is being processed.

Additional information is available in the [U.S. Department of Agriculture's Manual for Determining Eligibility for School Meals](#). School districts with questions should contact their [state child nutrition agency](#).