

"In a Nutshell": Determining Free and Reduced Price Eligibility and Verification Processes



IMPORTANT WEBLINKS TO GET STARTED

- [Free and Reduced Price](https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/national-school-lunch-program/free-reduced-applications) webpage (https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/national-school-lunch-program/free-reduced-applications)
- [Verification](https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/national-school-lunch-program/verification) webpage (https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/national-school-lunch-program/verification)
- [Direct Certification](https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/direct-certification) webpage (https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/direct-certification)
- [Calendar of Requirements](https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/calendar-of-requirements) (https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/calendar-of-requirements)
- [Overview of Free/Reduced/Verification webcast](https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/training/webcasts#fr) (https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/training/webcasts#fr)

RESOURCES FOR THESE PROCESSES

Online Contract for Program Participation

- [FNS Online Services](https://dpi.wi.gov/nutrition/online-services) (https://dpi.wi.gov/nutrition/online-services)
- Submit in late spring for upcoming year. User ID is required with password.
- Officials have roles in the free/reduced price and verification process and are listed on the contract: Determining, Confirming, Verifying, and Hearing.

[Eligibility Manual](https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/national-school-lunch-program/free-reduced-applications#em) (https://dpi.wi.gov/school-nutrition/national-school-lunch-program/free-reduced-applications#em)

- Provides comprehensive review of federal requirements, policies, and procedures for establishing eligibility.

AFTER JULY 1 - STEPS TO DETERMINE MEAL BENEFITS

Public Release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Around the start of the school year, the public must be notified that free and reduced price meals and/or free milk are available. ○ Use the current school year Public Release from DPI and keep all documentation regarding the submission of the Public Release. ○ Submit to local news media. School Food Authority (SFA) is not required to pay for printing charges. ○ Submit or post to an employment office in enrollment area and local grassroots organizations such as a food pantry, post office, library, etc.
Direct Certification (DC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ User rights must be requested from DPI for Direct Certification Program access. ○ Minimum of three DC runs are required each year after July 1. ○ DC eligibility codes determine free and reduced price meal benefits. See Direct Certification webpage for current codes list. ○ Determining official completes this process.

PROCESSING APPLICATIONS

Applications-Paper	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ After July 1, send: Parent letter, application, and instructions on how to fill out an application. ○ Use the current school year application and materials from DPI to send to families.
Applications-Electronic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If utilizing online applications, software must be approved by DPI before SFAs can accept online applications from families. ○ Update software at least annually, as applicable.

Determining Applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Applications need to be determined within 10 operating days of receipt; the determining official completes this task. ○ Use current income eligibility guidelines (IEG) to determine the eligibility status of applications.
Household Notifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Notify households of benefit eligibility from direct certification, application, or other source eligibility. ○ Compliant template letters are on the DPI website, which include the correct non-discrimination statement.
Extension of Benefits/Joint Custody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ When students match via direct certification or application, benefits can extend to other members in the household. ○ Direct certification benefits may extend to students in another household with joint custody. Benefits from a household application do not extend in a joint custody. ○ Free meal status from Foster or Other Source Categorical (Homeless, Migrant, Runaway or Head Start) does not extend to other members of the household.
Benefit Issuance List (BI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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.
Carry Over	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Student's eligibility status from the previous year is carried over into the current school year for up to 30 operating (school) days or until a new eligibility is determined, whichever comes first.
Disclosure/Sharing of Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SFA may disclose children's eligibility status only to person(s) determined to be directly connected with the administration or enforcement of a federal education program, state education program, or state health program. ○ Schools must seek written consent from parents/guardians to use information provided on applications for all other non-program. See the Eligibility Manual for further guidance.
Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hearing official oversees the appeal process according to proper procedures. ○ Meal/milk benefits remain in effect until the appeal process is completed.
COMPLETING THE VERIFICATION PROCESS	
Timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Start the verification process around October 1 each school year. ○ Use approved applications on file as of October 1 for the verification pool. ○ Complete the verification process by November 15 each school year.
Sampling Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If the SFA must use the standard sampling method, the SFA will receive a letter from DPI stating the required process. ○ Other SFAs may choose one of three sampling methods: standard (error prone), alternate one (random) or alternate two (special calculator).
Confirmation Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Confirming official checks selected application(s) for accuracy before Verifying official contacts the household(s). ○ Confirming official signs and dates the application or the tracking tool.
Tracking Verification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Verifying official tracks the verification process using the back of application or tracking tool provided on DPI website. ○ Send out verification letter to household(s), which notifies families that they have been selected for verification. ○ Household must provide documentation to support information listed on submitted application or benefits expire. ○ The Verifying official signs and dates the application or tool when completed.
Verification Collection Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete the Verification Collection Report (VCR) online and submit after verification is completed ○ Due by February 1 each school year.
RECORD RETENTION	
Record Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Keep all documents three years plus the current school year.

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