

Notifications for Meal Eligibility and Verification *In a Nutshell*

Local Education Agency's (LEA) Responsibilities and Guidelines

Before the Start of the School Year

Public Release

- LEA must send a notice to the general public which notifies households of free and reduced price meals or free milk (if applicable). This must occur after July 1 and before the start of the new school year.

Application Packet

- Provide the application packet (the application, instructions, and letter to the parents/FAQ) to every household. This must occur after July 1 and before the start of the new school year, unless the household is notified of meal benefits eligibility through direct certification (DC). Households with reduced DC eligibility may choose to submit an application.

Student Eligibility

Direct Certification (DC)

- Written letter of notification (email/mail) is required to be sent to households in a timely manner when students are found eligible on DC runs.

Processing Applications

- LEAs have 10 operating (school) days to process newly submitted free and reduced price meal applications.
- Within the 10 operating days, the household must be notified either in writing (email/mail) or verbally of their child's benefit status. For applications that are denied, households must be notified in writing.

Carryover of Benefits

- An individual child's free and reduced price eligibility status from the previous year will continue, within the same LEA, for up to 30 operating (school) days into the new school year or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever is first.
- During the carryover period, when a new determination is made (by application or DC), if the new meal benefit increases for a better meal benefit, the change must be made immediately, and the household is notified.
- During the carryover period, when a new determination is made (by application or DC), if the change is a decrease in meal benefits, the LEA must notify the household in writing. LEAs may have 1-5 calendar days to notify the household and change the benefit. Adverse action is not applicable if a child's eligibility expires at the end of the carryover period.
- On DC runs during the carryover period, an "N" code is not a new determination.

Verification

Verification Process

- The verification process begins around October 1 and must be completed by November 15.
- Complete application selection process and send the "We Must Check Letter" to selected household(s). Best practice: the LEA gives the household 7-10 calendar days to respond with requested documents. If the household does not respond, the LEA must make at least one more attempt to contact the household in writing (mail or email), by telephone or by text message.
- After verification is completed, the LEA must send the "We Have Checked Letter" to household(s).

Adverse Action

- During verification, households whose benefits are to be reduced or terminated must be given 10 calendar days written notice of the change prior to the date the change will go into effect.
- The "We Have Checked Letter" must include appeal rights.
 - If the household appeals the adverse action within the 10 calendar day advance notice period, the child who was determined to be eligible based on the application submitted will continue to receive free or reduced price meals during the appeal and hearing.
 - Written notification of the hearing summary must be provided to the household.

Additional Eligibility Resources found on the [Free and Reduced Meal Eligibility](#) webpage