



Wellness and Nutrition Services, Office of the Chief Operating Officer

MEMORANDUM

To: School Food Authorities

From: ***Lindsey Palmer***

Lindsey Palmer, RDN, LD
School Programs Manager

Date: May 29, 2015

Re: Revised Prototype Free and Reduced Price Application Materials: Policy Changes and Design Overview

State Agency Memo

NSLP #14-15

This memo is to give School Food Authorities (SFAs) a prototype application for free and reduced price school meals, which has been updated for School Year 2015-16. This prototype was redesigned to make it easier for families to complete so accurate information can be provided.

Modifications to Existing Policy Effective for SY 2015-2016

The following changes will be fully reflected in the 2015 edition of the *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*, which is currently under development and will be released in spring of 2015.

Streamlined income reporting for non-adult household members

Previously, USDA's prototype application requested individualized income reporting for each child household member. In recognition that many children and students do not receive income on a regular basis, the updated prototype format streamlines income reporting for all children and students into a *single* reporting field, located in the same section in which income for adults is reported. Adults must still report their income by household member and by category. The simplified process for child income reporting is intended to reduce confusion for household members completing the application and reduce clutter on the application.

Indication of 'No Income'

USDA has frequently received feedback regarding the attestation requirements for household members with no income to report. In prior years, State and local agencies were directed to

obtain an indication of no income from the applicant, such as requiring them to write a zero in each applicable field or mark a ‘No Income’ box or bubble. If an income field for any household member was left blank, that application was considered incomplete. In practice, many State and local officials have reported that applicants with no income typically leave the income reporting fields blank resulting in administrative burden for school districts in the form of unnecessary follow-up contact with households.

Beginning in SY 2015-2016, applications must still request that applicants write a zero when there is no income to report, but will no longer *require* a separate indication of no income from the applicant. Instead, applications must include a clear and easy to understand instruction that communicates to applicants that *any income field left blank is a positive indication of no income* and certifies that there is no income to report. As such, applications with blank income fields should be processed by the school district as complete. However, should local officials have known or available information that the household has intentionally misreported its income, they must verify any such application for cause.

Application Design Highlights

In addition to the above changes, the revised *Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals* features a number of design features and improvements that streamline and clarify the application process for households, including:

- At the head of the document, households are encouraged to apply online. (Only applicable for school districts where online applications are made available.)
- A “sidebar” has been incorporated to provide limited instructions and other pieces of helpful information to applicants while they fill out the application.
- Adult and non-adult (children/students) household members are cleanly divided into separate reporting sections to prevent household members from being listed twice, as well as to encourage full reporting of all household members.
- The reporting fields for non-adults have been expanded to better ensure that enough space is provided to write each child or student’s full name.
- All income reporting fields ask for whole dollars only, which simplifies income reporting for the household while reducing processing burden for the school district.
- Income descriptions on the application have been simplified to avoid confusing language.
- As an added accountability measure, a field has been added for reporting the total number of members in the household.
- Information about the Social Security Number is now requested in the same section as the income reporting field (rather than in the signature block), as applicants indicating categorical eligibility through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) are not required to provide this information.

- The phrase “(if available)” has been added to the address line in the signature section to provide flexibility to applicants who may lack a permanent address. Applications without an address are considered complete.
- Race and Ethnic Data collection survey and the USDA Non-Discrimination statement have been updated and remain on the prototype application. Although the survey is optional for households it is required to be on the application. The USDA Non-Discrimination statement must also be part of the application.

Accompanying Prototype Materials

The *Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals* is accompanied by the following materials:

- A prototype letter to households, titled *Frequently Asked Questions About Free and Reduced Price School Meals*
- Prototype application instructions, titled *How to Apply for Free and Reduced Price School Meals*

All questions should be sent to your designated Program Specialist.