



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF

EDUCATION

## MEMORANDUM

To: School Food Authorities

From: *Elizabeth Leach*

Elizabeth Leach  
School Programs Manager

Date: May 27, 2016

Re: Prototype Free and Reduced Price Meal Application Materials for the 2016-17 School Year

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State Agency Memo  
NSLP #06-16

This memo is to give School Food Authorities (SFAs) a prototype application and accompanying materials for free and reduced price meals, which has been updated for the 2016-17 school year. This prototype was updated by the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to make it easier for families to complete so accurate information can be provided. Program operators are encouraged to use this prototype to support access to school meals, especially for children whose parents may have limited literacy, and to strengthen program integrity. Program operators that use this prototype application in the upcoming school year guarantee compliance with Federal requirements and will meet all criteria examined during administrative reviews for the application in the 2016-17 school year.

The prototype features a series of customer service-oriented adjustments that intend to enhance its utility for local program operators. This memorandum highlights and explains these changes and also details features that are currently required.

The *2016-17 Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals* is accompanied by the following materials:

- 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*
- Prototype information sharing authorizations, verification materials, and benefit issuance notifications, titled *Additional Prototype Materials*, and includes:
  - *Sharing Information with Medicaid/CHIP*
  - *Sharing Information with Other Programs*

- *We Must Check Your Application*
- *We Have Checked Your Application*
- *Notice to Households of Approval/Denial of Benefits*
- *Notice of Direct Certification*

## **Policy Clarifications Effective for the 2016-17 School Year**

### **Indication of ‘No Income’**

All household applications for free and reduced price school meals must request that applicants write a zero when there is no income to report, but they may not *require* a separate indication of no income from the applicant, such as a check box or other fill-in field. 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 are to be processed by the school district as complete, rather than incomplete as in prior practice. If local officials have information that the household has intentionally misreported its income, they must verify any such application for cause.

### **Survey of Race and Ethnicity**

The survey of race and ethnicity and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Non-Discrimination Statement are required elements of any application for free and reduced price school meals. Please note that the wording of the USDA Non-Discrimination statement has been revised; local agencies are required to use the current USDA Non-Discrimination statement on all free and reduced price school meal applications. The current USDA Non-Discrimination statement may be referenced at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-nondiscrimination-statement>.

## **Design Changes to the 2016-17 Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals**

A series of streamlining changes have been made to the *2016-17 Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals*. These modifications are intended to improve application processing and provide additional clarity for applicants. Inclusion of these elements on application forms is optional.

### **“Grade” Reporting Field**

A “Grade” field has been added to the children and students reporting section (Step 1). It is important to note that inclusion of the “Grade” field on free and reduced price application forms is optional, as are other similar identifiers such as school name and student ID number that may facilitate, but are not essential to, the eligibility determination process.

### *“For School or District Use Only” Section*

A section to assist the review process for determining officials has been reintroduced into this year’s prototype application. This section is located at the bottom of the reverse side of the prototype application form, and provides income conversion guidelines, fields to report the calculated total household income and frequency, indication of eligibility determination, and signature/date blocks for determining and verifying officials. School and district use sections are not a required element of free and reduced price school meal applications, and may be included at the option of the local agency.

### *“Sources of Income” Charts*

In last year’s release of prototype application materials, helpful charts were included in the instructions document listing the reportable sources of income for children and adults. In an effort to make this information more easily referenced for household applicants, these charts have been moved from the instructions document to the top of the prototype application form’s reverse side. Detailed income reporting instructions are still listed in the prototype instructions document. Local agencies have the option of providing a list or chart of income sources on the application form. While inclusion of such information is recommended, it is not required.

### **Other Recommended Design Elements of the 2016-17 Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals**

The following are design changes that were previously made to the *2016-17 Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals* and included in the current version. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) strongly encourages local agencies to include the following design elements in their application forms.

#### *Income Reporting in Whole Dollars*

OSSE strongly recommends that all income reporting fields on the application ask for sums in whole dollars only. This simplifies income reporting for the household while reducing processing burden for the school district. Standard rounding rules may be applied under this approach; to round off amounts to the nearest whole dollar, drop amounts under 50 cents and increase amounts from 50 to 99 cents to the next dollar.

#### *Separate Reporting for Children and Adults*

Free and reduced price school meal applications are recommended to clearly separate household member reporting sections for infants, children, and students up to grade 12 from those for adult household members. This layout is intended to reduce the risk of duplicate entries and make it easier for households to accurately list all members.

### *Total Household Members Reporting Field*

OSSE recommends including on the application a field for reporting the total number of members present in the household. This is intended as an accountability safeguard, and to further encourage households to report all members who are present. For example, households may accidentally omit household members who do not attend school or do not receive income when listing household members separately.

### **Design Changes to Other Prototype Materials**

The prototype instructions document has been redesigned for the 2016-17 school year in an effort to enhance its usefulness as a step-by-step guide, while reducing printing costs for local agencies. The updated instructions document has not received substantive content changes compared to last school year, however, the new design employs a horizontal (rather than vertical) page orientation and reduces the page count from four pages to two.

### **Non-English Language Versions**

This initial release only includes the English language version of the prototype materials. A Spanish language translation will follow shortly. FNS is in the process of translating the prototype materials into a total of 49 languages which are expected to be published prior to the start of the 2016-17 school year.