



## POLICY STATEMENT

### Ways to Assist Families During Economic Downturn

**Source:** USDA Memo SP 15-2009.  
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**Audience:** All School Food Authorities  
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**Replaces:** None  
**Program:** NSLP

## INTRODUCTION

This memorandum serves to clarify the effect of year-long duration of eligibility on changes in income that may occur during the school year and to discuss how local educational agencies (LEAs) may assist families who may be experiencing financial hardships.

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

### A. YEAR-LONG DURATION OF ELIGIBILITY OF FREE AND REDUCED MEAL APPLICATIONS

1. Per 7 CFR 245.6(c)(1), free and reduced meal eligibility of a student must remain in effect for the entire school year once approved via direct certification, categorical eligibility, or the application process.
  - a. Applications determined eligible through the temporary approval process are exempt from this requirement.
2. Free and reduced meal eligibility must remain in effect for the first 30 operating days of the subsequent school year unless a new application, categorical eligibility determination or direct certification is available for the student.
  - a. If a new application, categorical eligibility determination or direct certification is available for a student prior to the end of the first 30 operating days of the subsequent school year, the LEA must process the new eligibility information and the new eligibility determination supersedes the carryover eligibility determination.
  - b. Upon conclusion of the first 30 operating days of the subsequent school year, a student must be changed to the "paid" eligibility status if no new eligibility information is available for a student.

### B. OPPORTUNITIES FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEAL ELIGIBILITY RECONSIDERATION DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR

1. Reporting Changes During the School Year – While households are not required to report changes in circumstances during the school year, a household may contact LEAs to report any changes
  - a. A new application is not required. LEAs may record the reported changes and changed level of benefits (if applicable) on the current

- application. The LEA official recording the changes must initial and date the application.
- b. When a change increases the level of benefits (such as reduced to free), LEAs are encouraged to put the change into effect within three operating days.
2. Transfer Students – LEAs may experience an increase of families moving into the school district. LEAs are reminded that they may share/ accept a child's existing eligibility determination from another LEA.
    - a. Please reference Part 3, Section O in the "Eligibility Manual for School Meals: Federal Policy for Determining and Verifying Eligibility" United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidance manual, January 2008 edition for additional details on eligibility sharing between LEAs for the purposes of school meal program eligibility determinations.
  3. Outreach – LEAs are encouraged to inform families about the availability of free and reduced price meal benefits for eligible children throughout the school year and to utilize the procedures described in this memo.
    - b. LEAs may also complete an application for a child known to be eligible if the household fails to apply.
      - i. The requirements for this process are discussed in Part 3, Section J of the "Eligibility Manual for School Meals: Federal Policy for Determining and Verifying Eligibility" USDA guidance, January 2008 edition.

Please keep this memo on file for reference. A copy of the memo is available for downloading from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) website at: <http://www.education.ohio.gov/>. If you have any questions regarding this memo, please contact your ODE School Meal Programs Regional Consultant at 1-800-808-6325. The School Meal Programs are administered by the Ohio Department of Education, Office for Safety, Health, and Nutrition. The Office is located at 25 S. Front St, Mail Stop 303, Columbus, OH 43215.

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