

# Eligibility for Free or Reduced Price Meals in the National School Lunch Program Frequently Asked Questions

## WHO CAN RECEIVE FREE OR REDUCED PRICE MEALS?

- All children in households receiving benefits from **Food and Nutrition Services (FNS, formerly known as Food Stamps)**, the **Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)** or **Cash Assistance (CA)**, are eligible for free meals.
- Foster children that are under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court are eligible for free meals.
- Children participating in their school's Federally-funded Head Start program are eligible for free meals.
- Children who meet the definition of homeless, runaway, or migrant are eligible for free meals.
- Children may receive free or reduced-price meals if your household's income is within the limits of the Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines.

**HOW DO I KNOW IF MY CHILDREN QUALIFY AS HOMELESS, MIGRANT OR RUNAWAY?** Do the members of your household lack a permanent address? Are you staying together in a shelter, hotel, or other temporary housing arrangement? Does your family relocate on a seasonal basis? Are any children living with you who have chosen to leave their prior family or household?

**CAN HOMELESS, RUNAWAY AND MIGRANT CHILDREN RECEIVE FREE MEALS?** Yes, children who meet the definition of homeless, runaway, or migrant qualify for free meals. If your children meet the definition of homeless, runaway, or migrant but have not been informed that they will get free meals, contact the school's homeless, runaway, or migrant liaison.

**DO I NEED TO FILL OUT AN APPLICATION FOR EACH CHILD?** No. *Use one Free and Reduced-price School Meals Application for all students in your household.*

**SHOULD I FILL OUT AN APPLICATION IF I RECEIVED A LETTER THIS SCHOOL YEAR SAYING MY CHILDREN ARE ALREADY APPROVED FOR FREE MEALS?** No, but please read the letter you got carefully and follow the instructions. If any children in your household were missing from your eligibility notification letter, contact the School Nutrition Administrator in your school district immediately.

**MY STUDENT'S APPLICATION WAS APPROVED LAST YEAR. DO I NEED TO FILL OUT A NEW ONE?** Yes. Your student's application is only good for that school year and for the first few days of the next school year. You must send in a new application unless the school told you that your child is eligible for the new school year through direct certification. If you do not send a new application that is approved by the school or you have not been notified that your child is eligible for free meals, your student will be charged the full price for meals.

**CAN FOSTER CHILDREN RECEIVE FREE MEALS?** Yes, foster children that are under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court, are eligible for free meals. Any foster child in the household is eligible for free meals regardless of income.

**CAN STUDENT ENROLLED IN A SCHOOL'S FEDERALLY-FUNDED HEAD START PROGRAM RECEIVE FREE MEALS?** If your student meets this criterion, and you have not been informed that they will get free meals, you must contact the School Nutrition Administrator in your school district.

**WHO CAN RECEIVE REDUCED PRICE MEALS?** Students from families whose total household income is within the reduced priced limits on the Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines Chart can get school meals at a maximum reduced price of 30 cents for breakfast and 40 cents for lunch. There is a special provision in North Carolina that enables many students to receive all or a portion of reduced priced breakfast meals at no cost to the household. Contact the school's School Nutrition Administrator for specific details about this provision in your school.

**I GET WIC. CAN MY CHILDREN GET FREE MEALS?** Children in households participating in WIC may be eligible for free or reduced priced meals. Please send in a free and reduced meal application to your school.

**WILL THE INFORMATION I GIVE BE CHECKED?** Yes. We may also ask you to send written proof of the household income you report.

**IF I DON'T QUALIFY NOW, MAY I APPLY LATER?** Yes, you may apply at any time during the school year. For example, children with a parent or guardian who becomes unemployed may become eligible for free and reduced-price meals if the household income drops below the income limit.

**WHAT IF I DISAGREE WITH THE SCHOOL'S DECISION ABOUT MY APPLICATION?** You should talk to the district's School Nutrition Administrator, or you also may ask for a hearing by calling or writing to the School Nutrition Office.

**WHO SHOULD YOU INCLUDE AS MEMBERS OF YOUR HOUSEHOLD?** You must include all people living in your household, related or not (such as grandparents, other relatives or friends) who share income and expenses. You must include yourself and all children who live with you. If you live with other people who are economically independent (for example, people who you do not support, who do not share income with you or your children, and who pay a prorated share of expenses), do not include them.

**WHAT IF MY INCOME IS NOT ALWAYS THE SAME?** List the amount that you normally receive. For example, if you normally make \$1000 each month, but you missed some work last month and only made \$900, put down that you made \$1000 per month. If you normally get overtime, include it, but do not include it if you only work overtime sometimes. If you have lost a job or had your hours or wages reduced, use your current income.

**WHAT IF SOME HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS HAVE NO INCOME TO REPORT?** Household members may not receive some types of income we ask you to report on the application or may not receive income at all. Whenever this happens, please write 0 in the field. However, if any income fields are left empty or blank, those will also be counted as zeroes. Please be careful when leaving income fields blank, as we will assume you meant to do so.

**WE ARE IN THE MILITARY. DO WE REPORT OUR INCOME DIFFERENTLY?** Your basic pay and cash bonuses must be reported as income. If you get any cash value allowances for off-base housing, food, or clothing, or receive Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance payments, it must also be included as income. However, if your housing is part of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, do not include

your housing allowance as income. Any additional combat pay resulting from deployment is also excluded from income.

**MY SPOUSE IS DEPLOYED TO A COMBAT ZONE. IS THEIR COMBAT PAY COUNTED AS INCOME?** No, if the combat pay is received in addition to their basic pay because of your spouse's deployment and it wasn't received before your spouse was deployed, combat pay is not counted as income. Contact the district's School Nutrition Administrator for more information.

**WHAT IF THERE ISN'T ENOUGH SPACE ON THE APPLICATION FOR MY FAMILY?** List any additional household members on a separate piece of paper and attach it to your application. You may also contact the local School Nutrition Office to receive a second application.

**MY FAMILY NEEDS MORE HELP. ARE THERE OTHER PROGRAMS WE MIGHT APPLY FOR?** To find out how to apply for **Food and Nutrition Services (FNS, formerly Food Stamps)** or other assistance benefits, contact North Carolina Health and Human Services or call **1-866-719-0141**.

For more information, contact the NCDPI, Office of School Nutrition at (984) 236-2910 or contact the School Nutrition Administrator in the school district, charter school or non-public school or other participating institution in which your child is enrolled.