

For School Use Only

School Nutrition Programs Procedures for Approval/Denial of Applications for Educational Benefits

These are the main steps for a school food authority to review, and approve or deny, Applications for Educational Benefits, henceforth called *applications*. For more details about approving or denying applications, refer to the [USDA Eligibility Manual for Schools Meals: Determining and Verifying Eligibility](#).

The statements “eligible for free or reduced-price meals” and “approved for free or reduced-price meals” are used throughout these instructions. When participating in the Minnesota Free School Meals Program, all students receive meals at no cost regardless of eligibility. However, students’ meals must be correctly claimed as free, reduced-price, or paid to receive the correct federal and state reimbursements.

This procedure has four steps.

- A. Determine the type of application.
- B. Depending on the type of application, review whether the household has provided complete and clear information.
- C. Incomplete applications – Notify the household about what information is missing and time allowed for a response. If the application is not completed, notify the household of denial.
- D. Complete applications – Notify the household of the results. For example, a complete application based on household size and income is approved for free meals or reduced-price meals if household income is within the applicable income guidelines.

A. Determine the type of application

The minimum information that is required for a complete application depends on the type of application. The type of application is determined by which sections of the application were completed by the household:

- *Case Number* application: A case number has been provided in Step 2 of the application.
- *Foster Children Only* application: All children who need to be approved for meal benefits, in Step 1 of the application, are foster children.
- *Household Size/Income Only* application: Household size/income information is provided in Step 3 of the application. (There is no case number reported in Step 2.)
- *Combination – Household Size/Income + Foster Children* application: Separate approval or denial is needed for foster children and for other, non-foster children.

B. Check the application for completeness and review the information

Based on the type of application as listed above, review the application to determine whether it is complete or incomplete. If the information is incomplete or unclear, notify the household about providing the missing information as indicated in Section C of this document. If the information is complete, notify the household about approval or denial of school meal benefits as indicated in Section D of this document.

Application with a case number

All household children are automatically eligible for free school meals if any household member has provided a valid case number in Step 2 of the application. The case number must be from one of these three programs:

- Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Food Distribution on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)

A case number application is complete if the household has provided:

Step 1 – Children’s names

Step 2 – Case number

Valid case number:

- MFIP and SNAP case numbers are four to eight digits (usually seven or eight digits) with no letters.
- FDPIR uses Social Security number or the last four digits of the Social Security number followed by a letter.
- A Medical Assistance or WIC number does not qualify.

Step 3 – (This step is not required)

Disregard any income information provided in Step 3 if a valid case number has been provided in Step 2.

Step 4 – Signature

An adult household member must sign the application. The additional contact information that is requested is not required.

If any required information is missing or unclear, go to section C of this handout – Notify the household that the application is incomplete.

If the application is complete and meets all program requirements, approve the students for free meals. In the approval section of the application, check the “categorical eligibility” box and sign and date the application. Go to section D of this handout – Notify the household of approval.

Application for foster children only

Foster children have categorical (automatic) eligibility for free school meals if the children have been placed in a foster home by a state or county agency. (If there are both foster children and other children who need meal benefits, see the section below on approval of a combination application.)

An application for one or more foster children is complete if the household has provided:

Step 1 – Children’s names and indication that the children are foster children.

Step 4 – Signature

An adult household member must sign the application. The additional contact information that is requested is not required.

If any required information is missing for foster children, go to section C of this handout – Notify the household that the application is incomplete.

If an application for foster children only is complete, approve the students for free meals. Check the “categorical eligibility” box, sign, and date the application. Go to section D of this handout – Notify the household of approval.

Application with income information

If the application is completed with household size/income information only (no case number and no foster children), the application is complete if the household has provided:

Step 1 – Children’s names

Step 3 – All household members and incomes

- Last four digits of Social Security number (Step 3, Section A on the application): The person signing the application must either provide the last four digits of their Social Security number, or check the box that they do not have a Social Security number.
- If applicable—children’s total regular income (Step 3, Section B on the application): Total regular income to children such as SSI or wages. Space on the form is limited, so total income to children is requested. If children’s income is left blank, this is the household’s certification that there is no children’s income to report.
- Adult household members and incomes (Step 3, Section C on the application): The name and income(s) for each adult in the household. Leaving a row blank or entering a “0” is the household’s certification (promise) that the household member has no income to report.

Step 4 – Signature

An adult household member must sign the application. The additional contact information that is requested is not required.

If any required information is missing or unclear, go to section C of this handout – Notify the household that the application is incomplete.

If the application is complete: Review the information to determine whether to approve free or reduced-price meals or to deny meal benefits.

- Determine the total number of household members (the number of children listed in Step 1 of the application plus the number of adults listed in Step 3 of the application) and record the number in the approval section under “household size.”

- Determine the total income* for the household from Step 3 of the application, including any income to children, and record the total household income in the approval section.

*All Total Income: If all household incomes are reported at the same frequency (all incomes are weekly, or all incomes are monthly, etc.), then add all income amounts together for total household income. If household incomes are reported at different frequencies, convert all incomes to annual amounts and then add together for total annual household income. To convert incomes to an annual income: multiply a weekly income by 52, a bi-weekly income by 26, a twice-per-month income by 24, or a monthly income by 12.

- Compare the total household income to the income ranges for the household size in the household income guidelines.
 - *Approve for free meals* if total household income is within the range for free meals.
 - *Approve for reduced-price meals* if total household income is too high for free meals but is within the income range for reduced-price meals.
 - *Deny the application* if total household income is higher than the income range for reduced-price meals.

Indicate the approval or denial status in the approval section by checking the free, reduced or denied box, sign and date the application. Go to section D of this handout – Notify the household of the results.

Combination – Application with income information and foster children

If the household has a combination of some foster children and some non-foster children who need to be approved for meal benefits, approval must be determined separately for the foster and non-foster children. Foster children have categorical (automatic) eligibility for free school meals. Approval of non-foster children depends on the total household size/income.

There may be different results for each group. For example, foster children may be approved for free school meals and other household children are approved for reduced-price meals or denied. In this situation, the application would show both approval and denial in the approval section.

Foster Children on an application

Children who are indicated in Step 1 of the application to be foster children have categorical (automatic) eligibility for free meals based on their foster status, regardless of the household incomes shown in Step 3 of the application.

For foster children, Steps 1 and 4 are required for a complete application.

Other Children on the same application

Non-foster children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals if they qualify based on:

- Total size of the household (include the foster children in household size) and
- Total income of the household (do not include foster care payments)

For household children other than foster children, Steps 1, 3 and 4 are required for a complete application.

If any required information is missing for either foster or non-foster children, go to section C of this handout – Notify the household that the application was incomplete for those children.

If the application is complete for the foster children, approve the foster children for free meals. In the approval section of the application, check the box to indicate Categorical Eligibility, and sign and date the application. Go to section D of this handout – Notify the household of approval of free meals for the foster children.

If the application is complete for the non-foster children, approve the non-foster children for free or reduced-price meal benefits or deny meal benefits in the approval section of the application. Sign and date the application. Go to section D of this handout – Notify the household of the results for the non-foster children.

C. Incomplete application - Contact household

Every reasonable effort should be made by the determining official to obtain the missing information prior to denying the application. Missing information is usually obtained by phone or in person, and dated and initialed on the application. Missing information also may be obtained by mail or email.

If the missing information is provided, return to section B of this document to determine whether the application is complete and will be approved.

If after reasonable efforts the required information has not been provided, use the [Application for Educational Benefits Notification of Results](#) from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) website to notify the household that the application has been denied. Document the denial in the approval section of the application form.

D. Complete application - Notify household of the results

Within 10 calendar days of receiving the application, send a notice of approval or denial to the household using the template notification letter [Application for Educational Benefits Notification of Results](#) provided on the MDE website. Document approval or denial on the application form.

In situations where there is an approval and a denial for different groups of students (for example, foster children are approved for free school meals, but other household children are approved for reduced-price meals or denied), multiple notification letters may be sent.

Summary – Information Required For a Complete Application for Educational Benefits

Information Requested on Application	Required for Case Number Application ¹	Required for Foster Child Application ¹	Required for Household Size/Income Application ¹
1. Names of children	√	√	√
Box checked to indicate foster status ¹	na	√	na
2. Case Number	√	na	na
3. Names and incomes of adults	na	na	√
Regular earnings of children ²	na	na	√
Last four digits of Social Security number or indication of no SSN	na	na	√
4. Check box to share household data with health care programs ³	na	na	na
Signature of adult household member	√	√	√

¹ If an application has a combination of foster children and other household children who need to be approved for meal benefits, the required information shown above is different for each group. For example, the application could be approved for the foster children but denied for the other household children.

² If the space for children's incomes is left blank, the household is showing that there is no children's income to report.

³ Not required. This is a "negative" check-off box – the household may leave the box blank, which shows that the household consents to sharing its data with health care programs. If the box is checked, the household does not consent to sharing its data.