

School Nutrition Programs - Requirements for Annual Collection of the Application for Educational Benefits Form

This explains which local educational agencies (LEA) are required to collect the Application for Educational Benefits form. Most LEAs collect the standard application form from households, following the procedures shown under *Schools required to collect the standard Application for Educational Benefits form*. Some LEAs are either exempt from the requirement or are public schools that collect an alternative application.

Schools exempt from collecting the Application for Educational Benefits form

Some local educational agencies (LEA) participate in School Nutrition Programs (SNP) but do not need to collect forms to provide school meal benefits. These types of LEA are exempt from the requirement to collect application forms:

- Residential child care institutions that have an approved resident income policy and have no day-only students.
- Environmental learning centers, or any school that serves only students whose school meal eligibility status already has been determined by another LEA.
- Nonpublic schools that are approved to participate for all meal services using special provision options – the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2 or 3 (not a base year).

Public schools required to collect the “alternative” Application for Educational Benefits form

Some public LEAs do not need to collect application forms in order to provide school meal benefits, because they provide all school meal benefits based on the special provision options of CEP or Provision 2 or 3. However these public schools still must annually collect household eligibility data on an “alternative” Application for Educational Benefits so that the LEA receives benefits like Compensatory Revenue funds.

- The alternative application form is provided by MDE School Finance and is available on the MARSS – Student Accounting page of the MDE website at [School Finance / MARSS – Student Accounting](#).

- The costs of distributing and processing alternative application forms are unallowable costs to the school food service account because the LEA does not need the information to provide school meal benefits.
- LEAs that have both CEP and non-CEP schools: An LEA that has CEP at some but not all schools may use the standard Application for Educational Benefits form, as described below, for all schools.

Schools required to collect the standard Application for Educational Benefits form

Most LEAs collect the standard Application for Educational Benefits form to determine student eligibility for free and reduced-price school meals. (For public LEAs, the current-year meal eligibility status is also recorded as the “economic indicator” on MARSS student files so that the LEA receives benefits like Compensatory Revenue funds.)

Required Contents of the Application Packet

The [application packet](#) for each school year is available on the MDE website. An LEA must check the dates on the application packet to ensure that the packet is for the correct school year. The application packet for the coming school year is reposted by June of each year and may be available directly from MDE at an earlier time.

The application packet includes:

1. Household Letter (1 page).

The LEA completes some of the information on the household letter, for example school contact person and hearing official. The letter should be printed with the LEA’s letterhead, or otherwise identify the LEA.

2. Instructions for completing the application (1 page – may be copied on back of the household letter).

The Instructions include only the higher household income guidelines that qualify for either free or reduced-price school meals. (Household income guidelines that the LEA will later use to approve students specifically for either free or reduced-price school meals are available on the MDE website.)

3. Application for Educational Benefits form (2 pages – copy back to back. The second page must be included).

Racial/ethnic data section: LEAs that have already collected racial/ethnic data for students should delete the racial/ethnic section (the gray area) of the application form.

Translations of the application packet: Spanish, Somali and Hmong translations of the application packet are available on the MDE website, from the links at the bottom of this page: [Student Meal Applications](#)

For languages other than Spanish, Somali and Hmong: LEAs may use USDA’s translations of its prototype letter, instructions and application. Translations of USDA prototype documents are available in over 30 languages on the USDA webpage: [Translated Applications](#). The [English version](#) of the USDA prototype documents are also available on the USDA website. Note: USDA does not include household income guidelines with the prototype documents.

Additional Contents of the Application Packet

An LEA may use the application packet to also meet the following requirements, if applicable to the LEA.

1. Other annual outreach requirements. LEAs usually have additional outreach requirements, which may be included in the application packet.

- Outreach for the School Breakfast Program (applies to LEAs with a breakfast program)

LEAs (public and private) that have one or more sites that offer the School Breakfast Program must annually outreach to households about the benefits of the program.

- Outreach for Minnesota Health Care Programs (applies to public LEAs)

Public LEAs are required by state law to annually notify families about the availability of Minnesota health care programs with the flyer developed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) and posted on the MDE website. The flyer is updated each year with income guidelines that go into effect on July 1.

The [Minnesota Health Care Programs Flyer](#) is available on the MDE website. To complete the flyer before distribution, the LEA must use the [DHS County and Tribal Information Directory](#) (DHS website) to find the local contact information for health care programs to insert into the LEA's flyer, which usually is the local county office.

Translations of the DHS flyer are available in Spanish, Somali and Hmong on the MDE website. Go to the links for translated documents at the bottom of the webpage: [SNP meal applications](#)

2. Consent to release eligibility data.

Consent to release data: The annual application packet may be used to obtain the household's consent for release of meal eligibility data to other school programs, for example waived or reduced activity fees. If there is insufficient space on the application or letter, consent may be obtained on a separate page in the application packet.

A consent to release eligibility data for other school purposes must be "affirmative", that is the household must check the box in order to allow its data to be shared. Consent for other school programs may not be added to the "negative" check box that is already on the application form for sharing eligibility data with health care programs.

Distribution of the Application Packet

An LEA must notify households about the availability of school meal benefits before the beginning of each school year. Application packets *may not be distributed before July 1* each school year, the date that the new household income guidelines are effective.

- Application packets should be distributed close to the beginning of the school year, for example within four weeks prior to school start. Updated application packets are posted to the MDE website each June and may be available directly from MDE at an earlier time. Year-round schools: Application packets may be distributed in June only by year-round schools that operate in July. Do *not* send application packets to students who have already been *directly certified* for the coming school year. The first direct certification data each school year is posted to CLICS 2 by the end of June each year.
- LEAs *may not require* households to complete applications. LEAs may facilitate the return of applications from households, for example by providing return envelopes.

Related Information

Information about other parts of the process for school meal benefits is available on the MDE website:

- Approval of applications: The LEA will use resources on the [SNP/Free and Reduced-Price Process/Student Meal Applications](#) page of the MDE website to review applications submitted by households, including: The procedure for approval or denial applications, the household income guidelines for both free and reduced-price meals, the USDA Eligibility Guidance Manual, the approval/denial letter to households, and information on rosters.
- Verification: At the beginning of each school year, MDE notifies LEAs of the requirement to verify a percentage of approved applications and report the results in CLICS 2. View the MDE website at: [SNP/Free and Reduced-Price Process/Verification](#)
- Direct Certification: MDE provides LEAs with ongoing direct certification data for free school meals via CLICS 2. View the MDE website at this page: [SNP/Free and Reduced-Price Process/Direct Certification](#)

If you have any questions about this information, contact MDE – Nutrition, Health and Youth Development at 651-582-8526, 1-800-366-8922 (MN Toll-free) or mde.fns@state.mn.us.