

MEMORANDUM

TO: Principals, School Food Service Managers & Directors, Career & Technical Center
Directors, and Superintendents

FROM: Laurie M Colgan, Director, Child Nutrition Programs

SUBJECT: Free & Reduced Price Student Eligibility Reminders

DATE: September 15, 2016

With the new school year under way, it's important to share some updates and reminders to successfully provide meal benefits to all of your students. Webinars will be presented later this month for the upcoming Verification Process.

Student Eligibility in Career & Technical Centers: Transferring eligibility information in a timely manner between schools and school food authorities (SFAs) ensures that qualifying students continue to receive school meal benefits as they attend a technical center. This transfer of eligibility between the schools ensures that qualifying students continue to receive benefits and avoids the possibility of unpaid meal charges. It is strongly recommended that the sending school prepare a list of students attending the career and technical center, include the eligibility category with the date of eligibility, and then send that information to the school food service director at the technical center site. The technical center site may accept the eligibility determination from the student's sending school without incurring liability for the accuracy of the former determination. As an alternative, the sending school could also copy the approved free & reduced meal applications and send them directly to the technical center.

Students Transferring between Schools in the Supervisory Union: Eligibility for free and reduced price meal benefits must transfer to schools within the same SFA or Supervisory Union when a student moves to another school during the school year. The date of the transfer must be noted on the application. The information should be provided to the approving officer at the new school either through written notice or by providing a copy of the free & reduced price meal application.

In the event that the student is moving from a Community Eligibility or Provision 2 School to a non-provision school, that student will be eligible for free meals for up to 30 operating days or until a new eligibility determination is made.

Students Transferring to Schools Outside of the Supervisory Union: The transfer of eligibility for free or reduced price meal benefits may transfer from the former school to the new school. Again, the new school does not incur liability for the accuracy of the former determination. The transfer of eligibility information is strongly encouraged but not required.

Direct Certification Lists: The Direct Certification process makes students eligible for free school meals without the need for a free and reduced price meal application. This eligibility determination is made using the Direct Certification List from the Student Census. Schools and school food authorities are required by Federal Regulation to access the Direct Certification Lists from the Student Census no less than three times per year, however the VT State Agency's strongly recommended best practice is to access this list each month to ensure that as many eligible students as possible have access to school meals. We all know the impact of poor or no nutrition on the brain and the child's ability to learn, so we ask that all schools access the Direct Certification each and every month to determine the new names that are added to the list. The first Direct Certification List is posted in July and on approximately the 20th of each subsequent month. Accessing the list each and every month ensures that eligible students may receive free school meals as soon as possible which benefits the students, families and the school.

Pre-K Meals: Many schools are now enrolling preschool students in their schools and school meal programs. This is an excellent way to increase your meal program participation and provide good nutrition to your new students, even if your school has split session morning and afternoon programs. To make the meal process easier, the Pre-K meal pattern is quite simple to implement and provides smaller portions of food as appropriate for the smaller tummies and appetites. Many preschool programs opt to provide meals in the classrooms to provide opportunities for children learning to follow directions, self-help skills, language development, social skills, math skills and nutrition. Breakfast may be served later in the morning in the classroom as a hearty morning snack and lunch is a great way to begin an afternoon session.

To facilitate the meal program implementation, schools should distribute meal applications to the households like they do for other students in the schools. Students enrolled in the federal Head Start program are considered 'Other Source Categorically Eligible for Free Meals' and would only need a master list provided by the Head Start teacher for documentation. Pre-school students with siblings already in school may easily be added to the meal applications and master lists.

We also have guidance available for Pre-K programs and pre-schools that wish to provide family style meal service to students in the classroom.

If you have questions about providing meals to your Pre-K or pre-school students, or about program eligibility, please contact me at Laurie.Colgan@vermont.gov or at 479-1187.