

**Issue Date:** Jun 28, 2024

# **School Meals Program Timeline of Important Dates School Year 2024-2025**

## **How to Use this Document**

Simultaneously press “ctrl” on your keyboard and click a date below to follow the link to that section in the document.

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## July 1 or Earlier

- Using [AOE templates](#), prepare one of the following:
  - Free and Reduced-Price Meal Applications and Cover Letters (only for Pricing Programs or programs operating in a Base Year of Provision 2)
  - [Household Income Forms](#) (HIF) and Cover Letters (only for schools operating CEP and schools operating Provision 2 in a Non-Base Year)
    - Note: Nonprofit School Food Service Account funds cannot be used to pay for the distribution and processing of the Household Income Form as it is not required for the School Meals Programs.
  - Free Milk Applications and Cover Letters (only for schools operating the Special Milk Program instead of the School Meals Program)

*Note: New materials may not be sent out until July 1, unless the Program operates the NSLP/SBP year-round.*

- Choose Determining Official, Verifying Official, and Hearing Official for your School Food Authority (SFA). Enter their names and contact information in the 'Determining and Hearing Official' tab of the School Nutrition Program Application in the [Harvest Child Nutrition System](#).
- Determine the 30<sup>th</sup> operating day for the 30-day carryover period. Student status will carry over from the prior year until the 30<sup>th</sup> operating day of the school year.
- If you will be using an electronic Free and Reduced-Price Meal Application for the first time, contact the State Agency to have the system reviewed and approved. In the 'Eligibility' tab of your School Nutrition Program application in Harvest, indicate if you will be using an online application system.
- Complete and submit the 24-25 School Nutrition Program Renewal Application in Harvest. **This application must be submitted and approved prior to the start of meal service.**
- Business managers should review food service program budget for the upcoming year with food service director or managers.
- If the school or SFA is contracting with an FSMC, the contract must be approved by the state and executed prior to the start of meal service.

## Early August

- Determining officials and verification officials attend the applicable Eligibility Determination and Verification classes at [2024 Child Nutrition Summer Institute](#)
  - Choose which is appropriate for each Official based on their level of experience and training: *Refresher on Determining Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals for Experienced Determining Officials* or *Modules 1-3 of Determining Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals*.
  - If your SFA is on the Ameliorative Action List, or has a new Verifying Official, plan to attend *Verification Process for School Meals*.

- All staff involved in the Child Nutrition Programs should receive annual Civil Rights training (available at Summer Institute).
- Review the following policies/procedures to ensure they are current:
  - [Wellness Policy](#)
  - [Civil Rights Complaint Procedure](#)
  - [Meal Charge Policy](#)

## August, and then Monthly

- Make Direct Certification determinations and update your master list. Direct Certification data is uploaded from DCF around the 20th of each month. AOE sends a monthly notification to the Business Managers and Food Service Directors Listservs when the new data is available.
  - **Public Schools:** The Data Manger [uploads a DC#03 unofficial enrollment list into the EdFusion system](#) and downloads the direct certification matches the following day. Some food service managers and determining officials also have access to download matches once the Data Manager uploads unofficial enrollment.
  - **Independent Schools:** Contact the AOE Help Desk at [AOE.SLDSSupportGroup@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.SLDSSupportGroup@vermont.gov) to request a secure email chain. Once you receive a secure email you may reply within that secure thread with a completed [Independent School Direct Certification Status Form](#).
- Contact the [Homeless Liaison](#) for a list of students that may be directly certified for free meals due to their homeless or runaway status. Add these students to your master list.
- If Head Start students eat school meals, contact the Head Start teacher for a list of Head Start students. Add these students to your master list as directly certified for free meals.
- Look for letters to principals and foodservice from the Migrant Education Program with the names of any students enrolled in the Migrant Education Program. Add these students to your master list as directly certified for free meals.
- Contact the registrar for the names of any students in DCF custody (State-placed foster). Add these students to your master list as directly certified for free meals.
- Complete and send [Notification of Direct Certification Pre-Approval for School Meals Letters](#) to directly certified households.
- Ensure that directly certified students are correctly categorized as 'Free' or 'Reduced' in your POS system.
  - Note: 3SquaresVT, RUFA, and Medicaid >130 recipients should be categorized as 'Free'. Medicaid >185 recipients should be categorized as 'Reduced'.
- Submit monthly claims for reimbursement in Harvest
  - The deadline to submit claims is 60 days after the last day of the month.

- Only one exception is allowed every 36 months.
- If contracting with an FSMC, review monthly invoices to ensure they are in line with the contract.
- Food Service Director/Managers should release USDA Foods from the warehouse/order DoD Fresh.

### **No Later than the First Day of School**

- Distribute the appropriate forms to households (as listed under “July 1 or Earlier”)
- If not using an electronic system, start a Master List to track student status of Free and Reduced-Price Eligibility over the course of the school year.
- Provide Meal Charge Policy to households, if applicable.

### **Within the First 4 Weeks of Operation (for those operating the NSLP Afterschool Snack Program)**

- Complete the [NSLP Afterschool Snack Service Site Monitoring Form](#) for all sites. This is one of two required Afterschool Snack reviews to be conducted during the year. The second monitoring review must be completed before the end of Program operation.

### **As Free and Reduced Meal Applications are Submitted**

- Process applications as they are submitted and notify households as quickly as possible of their status, taking no longer than 10 operating days to notify households of their eligibility determination.
- Enter updated student eligibility into POS System.
- Be sure to mark all [error prone](#) applications during the eligibility determination process; these will be used to determine your verification sample. *(Please note: If operating Provision 2 in a base year, applications are still being collected, and therefore verification must still be conducted.)*

### **As New Students Arrive**

- **Public Schools:** Ask Data Manager to add new student to the unofficial enrollment list and retrieve the DC #03 to determine if students are directly certified.
- **Independent Schools:** Contact the AOE Help Desk at [AOE.SLDSSupportGroup@vermont.gov](mailto:AOE.SLDSSupportGroup@vermont.gov) to request a secure email chain. Once you receive a secure email you may reply within that secure thread with the name of the new student in the [Independent School Direct Certification Status Form](#).
- Provide the Free & Reduced-Price Meal Application and Cover Letter to new households as part of the enrollment packet.

## 20th Operating Day of School

- Distribute Reminder Letters notifying households that prior year benefit determinations will end on the 30th day of school (this applies to Pricing Programs only).

## 30th Operating Day of School

- Update the POS system to ensure students with prior year free- or reduced-eligibility who have not submitted a new application, or been newly determined directly certified, are marked as 'paid' in the system.

## October 1

- Begin the Verification process:
  - Determine the number of approved applications on file. This is the Sample Pool.
  - Enter the number of approved applications on file in the [Verification Calculator](#) to determine the number of applications that must be chosen for verification, this is the Sample Size. Make note about "Standard Method" of verification.
  - Select the Sample Size from the error prone applications.
  - Track the verification process in the [Verification Log Worksheet](#).
  - Record application and eligible student data in the [Paper Copy of the Verification Report](#).
- Last day for Independent Schools with an August or September start date to decide to start a Provision 2 base year.

## October 15

- Deadline to submit the Policy Statement for Free and Reduced Meals:
  - Schools operating in their first year of a CEP cycle or in a Non-Base Year of Provision 2 must complete the [Provision 2 Amendment](#) or [CEP Amendment](#) and upload this in the "Eligibility" tab of the School Nutrition Program Application.

## November 15

- Deadline to complete the Verification process. \*
  - \* *SFAs that will not complete the Verification Process by November 15th must request a waiver from the State Agency.*
- SFAs planning to go out to bid for new [Food Service Management Company Contracts](#) in School Year 25-26 should begin the process of drafting an RFP.

## December 9

- Deadline to submit the Financial Report in Harvest.

- Deadline to submit Local Foods Incentive Grant applications.

### **December 15**

- Deadline to submit the Verification Report Data Collection in Harvest.
- Deadline to complete and submit the Site Enrollment Data Collection in Harvest, reporting 10/31 data.

### **February 1**

- Deadline to conduct Site Reviews of each site/school if SFA has more than site/school and complete [On-Site Monitoring Form](#) for all sites.
- Deadline to complete [Food Service Management Company \(FSMC\) Monitoring Form](#) for schools with an FSMC.

### **During School Year 2024-2025**

- Ensure annual [professional standards training requirements](#) have been met for all staff involved in the Child Nutrition Programs.
- **For those operating NSLP Afterschool Snack Program:** Complete the [NSLP Afterschool Snack Service Site Monitoring Form](#) for the second, and final time of the year.

### **Late February/ Early March**

- Review direct certification process to ensure the current list is up to date ahead of April 1 Community Eligibility Provision Data Collection.

### **April 1 - 15**

- Submit the Community Eligibility Provision Data Collection in Harvest by April 15th. **This report is required of all SFAs, except RCCIs**

### **June 1**

- Deadline to submit initial Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) application in Harvest, if operating.

### **June 30**

- Deadline to submit the [Letter of Intent](#) to Participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), if planning to begin or restart a CEP cycle in the 25-26 School Year =.
- Ensure that all USDA Foods have been released from warehouse and all USDA DoD Fresh funds expended.
- Complete [FSMC Contract Evaluation Worksheet](#) if using a FSMC.

- FSMC contract renewals or original contracts executed after review by state agency.

## **Additional Guidance**

Please refer to [USDA's Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#) for more guidance on the process of eligibility determination and verification.

## **Nondiscrimination Statement**

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: [Program.Intake@usda.gov](mailto:Program.Intake@usda.gov)

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