

2025-2026 Child Nutrition Program Benefit Application Guidance

Students are only eligible for reduced price or free meal benefits when a complete application has been approved or documentation of direct certification is on file. Applications cannot be approved until all required information is completed. To obtain missing information from the household, the determining official must:

1. Return the application requesting completion of the missing information.
OR
2. Require the parent/guardian to come to the determining official's office to complete the required information.
OR
3. Contact the household by telephone and obtain missing information. The determining official must record the additional information on the application, the name of the person who provided the information, and initial and date the entry.

Abbreviations:	FA	Food Assistance
	FC	Foster Child
	FDPIR	Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
	DCF	Department for Children & Families
	SS	Social Security
	TAF	Temporary Assistance to Families
	MED-F	Medicaid Free
	MED-R	Medicaid Reduced

ERROR or SITUATION	ACTION REQUIRED
A. Household Members	
1. Effective date of eligibility based on application	Effective date of eligibility is the date the household application is approved OR the date of submission if approved use of flexibility as indicated on the Sponsor Application in KN-CLAIM.
2. More than one foster child is listed on application.	All foster children may now be listed on one application.
3. A foster child's application does not contain income information.	Foster children are now considered directly certified, so income is not required to be listed for foster children.
4. Household completes an application that includes all household members and foster children . Income received for foster care is also listed. The foster children's personal use income is not included.	Contact an adult listed on the application and explain that payments received by the household for providing foster care are not included in the household's income but the foster children's personal use income does need to be included. The foster children will be directly certified as free regardless of income. The other children listed on the application will be approved based on income.
5. FA or TAF case number is invalid (must be 8 digits beginning with 0, 1 or 2) and income/household size information is not complete.	Use the KN-CLAIM Direct Certification process to determine if student receives FA or TAF: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If student is matched in KN-CLAIM, directly certify student by printing the KN-CLAIM Direct Certification list as documentation and sending Notify Household about School Meal Benefits letter. • If student is <u>not</u> matched in KN-CLAIM, contact an adult listed on the application to obtain household size and income information or the correct FA/TAF number. The local DCF office may also be contacted to obtain correct FA/TAF number. If student is not eligible for FA or TAF, household size and income information must be completed before eligibility can be determined.
6. Household reports a FA or TAF or FDPIR case number	If a household's Application for Child Nutrition Program Benefits lists a valid Food Assistance, TAF or FDPIR case number, ALL of the students listed on the application are automatically eligible for free school meals regardless of household income. Check KN-CLAIM's Direct Certification list to see if the household can be directly certified.

Child Nutrition Program Benefit Application Guidance

ERROR or SITUATION	ACTION REQUIRED
Household Members, continued	
7. Household reports a Medicaid case number	Only those students listed on the KN-CLAIM Direct Certification list can be certified for free or reduced meals based on Medicaid. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If student is matched in KN-CLAIM, directly certify student by printing the KN-CLAIM Direct Certification list as documentation and sending Notify Household about School Meal Benefits letter. • If student is <u>not</u> matched in KN-CLAIM, contact an adult listed on the application to obtain household size and income information. If student is not eligible based on Direct Certification for Medicaid, household size and income information must be completed before eligibility can be determined. • If student is on the Direct Certification as eligible for MED-R, household may fill out an income application if they feel they would qualify for Free meals. • Eligibility by Medicaid does extend to other students living in the household at the same benefit level, so either MED-F or MED-R.
8. FA or TAF case number from another State	Contact FA agency in that State to confirm a valid case number from that State. Document contacted State Agency to confirm valid case number.
9. Household did not indicate frequency of income .	Contact household to determine income frequency.
10. Income information is not clearly stated.	Contact an adult listed on the application and request clarification. Do NOT make assumptions about income.
11. Household indicates a range of income .	Contact an adult listed on the application to determine income received in the month prior to the application OR annualized income, whichever most accurately reflects current income.
12. Total household income is listed rather than reported by household member and income source.	Contact an adult listed on the application and obtain income by household member and income category.
13. Household reports income from prior year's income tax information rather than current income.	Contact an adult listed on the application to clarify income. Household may use prior year's income tax information <u>only</u> if income reported is seasonal, farm, or from self-employment; and only if last year's income is representative of the current year's estimated income. If prior month's income is more representative of household's current income, the household should report prior month's income amount.
14. Self-employment income is listed only on the back of the application and is not recorded on the front of the application.	Record income listed on back of application on front of application, next to name of household member who receives the income. If unclear, contact household for clarification.
15. Household reports an income loss from one or more income sources but has income from other sources.	Income from wages or other income sources may not be reduced by the amount of a business loss. Negative self-employment income is computed as zero income. When computing household income, include only income amounts that are positive numbers.
16. Household submits an updated application and benefits increase (e.g. reduced price to free)	Increase benefits within three (3) working days, or as soon as updated application is approved.
17. Household submits updated application and benefits decrease (e.g. from free to reduced price)	Inform an adult listed on the application that it is not necessary to update application because original approved benefits are valid for entire school year. Decrease benefits ONLY if requested by household. If household requests that lower benefits go into effect, send We Have Reviewed Your Application letter and note contact on application.

Child Nutrition Program Benefit Application Guidance

ERROR or SITUATION	ACTION REQUIRED
B. Adult Household Member Information	
1. No SS number is reported.	For applications approved based on income, obtain the last four digits of the SS number from adult signing the application unless an emancipated child. SS number may NOT be obtained from other school records and transferred to application. If adult signing the application does not have a SS number, and has checked the box or has written the word "No" or "None", the application may be approved without the SS number. The abbreviation "NA" is NOT acceptable. Don't assume adult signing application has no SS number if one is not listed. Contact household to obtain information. SS numbers are NOT required for applications approved based on FA, TAF or FDPIR eligibility or for foster child or emancipated child applications.
2. SS number reported is NOT that of adult who signed application.	Treat application as if no SS number is reported. Obtain the last four digits of the SS number of adult who signed application or obtain signature of adult whose SS number was provided.
3. There is no adult signature on application.	Contact household and obtain adult's signature. If the student is emancipated, the student must sign the application. If student is a foster child, the foster parent or caseworker must sign application.
4. Adult household member's name, address, telephone numbers or e-mail is not reported.	This information is helpful but not required. Do NOT delay approval if household fails to provide this information.
C. Other Application Situations	
1. Applications have been faxed .	Faxing is an insecure way to transmit confidential information. School personnel should NEVER fax completed applications or direct certifications. Use regular mail or district courier for these documents. Although households should be discouraged from faxing applications, such applications may be accepted.
2. Applications have been emailed.	Applications maybe received via email as long as the application contains all the required information and signed by an adult household member. Original signatures are not required.
3. No meal application or direct certification is on file, but the student's meals were claimed for reduced price or free meal reimbursement.	Student is NOT eligible for reduced price or free meals until he/she has an approved application or direct certification on file. File amended claims for all meals incorrectly claimed as reduced price or free. If an application or direct certification is received and approved, begin claiming reduced price or free meals on the date application was approved or date created on DC list if using approved flexibility.
4. Student(s) transferred from another sponsor's school to your school. When enrolling, household brings copy of application from previous sponsor.	Obtain a new application from household OR determining official can review original application, determine eligibility, initial and date. Application for CNP Benefits cannot be released by former school with other education records.
5. Student(s) transferred from another sponsor's school to your school. When enrolling, the household brings only a copy of Notification of Eligibility letter from previous sponsor.	Obtain a new application from household or access the KN-CLAIM Direct Certification process and determine if the student is eligible for FA/TAF/Medicaid or is a foster child. Meals may NOT be claimed as reduced price or free until a complete application is approved or direct certification is obtained by the new sponsor. Application for CNP Benefits cannot be released by former school with other education records.
6. An application or direct certification was approved by a sponsor where student is enrolled; but student attends special classes and eats meals at another sponsor's school.	If student is enrolled with Sponsor A and attends school at Sponsor B, Sponsor A should mail a copy of application or direct certification to Sponsor B. Determining official for Sponsor B must review application or direct certification to assure it is correctly determined, sign and date it.

Child Nutrition Program Benefit Application Guidance

ERROR or SITUATION	ACTION REQUIRED
7. Not all required information was listed on application.	Contact an adult listed on the application to obtain required information such as income, last four digits of the Social Security number, number of household members, names of household members and their income. Document contact, record information obtained and make determination.
8. Total Household Members (Children and Adults) do not match total number of names listed.	Contact an adult listed on the application to obtain correct household size and member names. Document contact recording information obtained and make determination.
9. Not all household members or income sources were reported on application.	Determining official must make initial determination based upon face value of application. However, immediately after application is approved, sponsor may verify application for cause.
10. Student is listed on applications for two different households.	If student is living in more than one household, student is considered a member of each household. If households do not have same eligibility status, student receives greatest level of benefits.
D. Direct Certification (DC)	
1. Effective date of eligibility based on Direct Certification	Effective date of eligibility is the date on the Notify Household about School Meal Benefits letter OR the date created on the DC list if approved use of flexibility as indicated on the Sponsor Application in KN-CLAIM.
2. A student living in a household receiving FA, TAF, MED-F or MED-R and is listed in the KN-CLAIM Direct Certification system and enrollment records indicate additional student(s) in that household.	If at least one household member is eligible for FA, TAF or MED-F, all students in the household are eligible for free school meals. If at least one household member is eligible for MED-R, all students in the household are eligible for reduced-price school meals. Use the sponsor's enrollment records to confirm that the additional students have the same address as is on the KN-CLAIM Direct Certification list. A student can be directly certified eligible for free meals only if (1) the student is eligible for FA, TAF or MED-F, or (2) if the sponsor can document that another member of the student's household is eligible for FA, TAF or MED-F. A student can be directly certified eligible for reduced-price meals only if (1) the student is eligible for MED-R, or (2) if the sponsor can document that another member of the student's household is eligible for MED-R.
3. A foster child is listed in the KN-CLAIM Direct Certification system as Foster and enrollment records indicate additional student(s) in that household.	The presence of a foster child in the household does not extend eligibility for free meals to all children in the household. Application for non-foster children may be incorrectly approved. Approve eligibility based on income.
4. After household is sent Notify Household about School Meal Benefits letter due to FA, TAF, MED-F or MED-R, the household informs school officials of additional student(s) in the household	Send household another Notify Household about School Meal Benefits letter listing the additional student. The effective date of the eligibility of the additional student is the date of the letter listing the student's name or the date the address was updated in the student database.
5. The household sent information from DCF that indicates FA or TAF eligibility, but does not include student names.	The student is directly certified for free meals only if the sponsor can confirm the student resides in the household receiving FA or TAF benefits. Determine from enrollment information if the student lives at the address as listed on the information sent from DCF. To document effective date of eligibility, send Notify Household about School Meal Benefits letter listing students' names residing in the household.
6. Students' names are listed in the KN-CLAIM Direct Certification system as eligible for FA, TAF, MED-F or MED-R.	Print KN-CLAIM Direct Certification list as documentation. Households must be notified in writing. Send Notify Household about School Meal Benefits letter via mail or email.

Child Nutrition Program Benefit Application Guidance

ERROR or SITUATION	ACTION REQUIRED
7. Using KN-CLAIM Direct Certification process, it is discovered that an enrolled student who has been claimed in the “paid” meal category is actually eligible for FA, TAF, MED-F or MED-R.	Print KN-CLAIM Direct Certification list as documentation. Households must be notified in writing. Send Notify Household about School Meal Benefits letter via mail or email. Student’s free or reduced-price eligibility status is effective on date letter is sent or date created if using approved flexibility.
8. The food service director was sent an email from a school counselor listing several students that she/he believed to be homeless or migrant students.	Food Service must receive a written list from the Homeless Liaison or Migrant Recruiter of the district (this may or may not be the school counselor) identifying students that have been defined as homeless or migrant. The list must be signed and dated by the Homeless Liaison or Migrant Recruiter. After receiving the list, the determining official directly certifies the students and notes the date students were processed into the accountability system. If using approved flexibility, start date of eligibility is the date on the list from the homeless liaison or migrant recruiter.