

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** Tuesday, Aug. 17, 2021

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### **Education department announces guidelines for 2021-22 free or reduced-price meal programs**

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Child and Adult Nutrition Services in the South Dakota Department of Education is releasing guidelines for the 2021-22 free milk or free and reduced-price meals programs. These guidelines provide useful information as parents make their plans for the upcoming school year. The policy applies to children unable to pay the full price of meals or milk served under the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, Special Milk, and/or Child and Adult Care Food Programs (CACFP). The administrative office of each school or agency that participates in any of these federal programs has a copy of the policy available for review.

The South Dakota Department of Education is offering South Dakota school districts the option to serve all student meals free of charge through the U.S. Department of Agriculture National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs. Flexibilities for grab-and-go or delivered meals may also continue through school year 2021-22. Families continue to face hardships from the pandemic, and this option will allow schools to serve more children and help relieve some financial strain.

Alternately, school districts can choose to operate a traditional school lunch program. The following information outlines a traditional school lunch program where children from families whose income is at or below the levels shown are eligible for free or reduced-price meals or milk at participating schools and agencies.

Families may apply for free or reduced-price meals or free milk for their children for school/program year 2021-22 according to guidelines effective July 1, 2021. Applications will be provided to households by the local school or agency. Families who are directly certified as eligible for free meals will receive a notice of eligibility from their school.

Schools will use the prior year's eligibility status (free, reduced-price, or paid) for up to the first 30 days of school or until a new application is approved or direct certification is obtained, whichever comes first. When the carry-over period ends, unless the household is notified that their children are directly certified, or the household submits an application that is approved, the children must pay full price for meals, and the school or agency will not send a reminder or a notice of expired eligibility.

Applications submitted to a facility that operates the CACFP are valid for a full year. Applications expire on the last day of the month one year after the application was submitted or approved.

Households that are currently on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) will receive letters from the school indicating that their children are eligible for free school meals. These families should not complete an application for free meals. All children in a household where any household member receives benefits under TANF or SNAP are eligible for free meals. This does not apply to CACFP. If any children were not listed on the notice of eligibility, the household should contact the school to have free meal benefits extended to them.

Families receiving commodities through the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) can request an Interagency Action Notice that can be brought to the school in place of an application to document free meal eligibility, or they can complete an application and list the FDPIR case number. All children in a household with any household member receiving benefits under FDPIR are eligible for free meals.

If the school or agency knows of children who are homeless, runaway, foster, from a migrant household, or who are enrolled in Head Start, they will send a letter to the household telling them the children are eligible for free meals. Contact the school or agency if the household does not get a letter because these children may be eligible for free meal benefits.

Foster children who are under the legal custody of a foster care agency or court are eligible for free meals. Any foster child in the household is eligible for free meals regardless of income. Households may include foster children on the application but are not required to include payments received for care of the foster child as income.

To apply for free or reduced-price meals, households should fill out the application and return it to the child's school or agency. An application must include the names of children for whom benefits are requested, all household members and their monthly income or designation that they do not have any income and be signed by an adult household member with the last four digits of that person's social security number. Incomplete applications cannot be approved for free and reduced-price meals or milk. Additional copies are available in the school or agency office. The information provided on the application is confidential and will be used for the purpose of determining eligibility status for meals. The school or agency will provide additional information if it wants to use eligibility status for other purposes. Households notified of their children's free meal eligibility must contact the school or agency if they wish to decline free meal benefits.

An eligibility determination is good for the whole school/program year; however, applications may be submitted at any time during the year. Contact the school or agency if a household member becomes unemployed or if the household size changes. The children from that household may be eligible for free or reduced-price meals or free milk during the time of unemployment if the household's income falls within the income eligibility guidelines. Information on any application may be verified at any time during the school/program year by school or other program officials.

If a parent or guardian is dissatisfied with the ruling on the application for eligibility, they may contact the determining official on an informal basis. If the parent or guardian wishes to make a formal appeal, an oral or written request may be made to the school or agency's hearing official for a hearing to appeal the decision.

Some schools or agencies may choose to send a special notice about the Children's Health Insurance Program to households with the application. It provides a way for school or agency personnel to know if families will allow them to use the child's eligibility status for other program benefits. The decision whether a household is eligible for meal benefits is not affected by this form.

Participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) may be eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

If a child needs a special diet as prescribed by a doctor, the household should contact the school or agency's food service manager.

**Non-discrimination Statement:** This explains what to do if you believe you have been treated unfairly. In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program complaint of discrimination,

complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), (AD-3027) found online at: [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter 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;
  - (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
  - (3) mail: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).
- This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

The income scales below are used to determine an applicant’s eligibility for free or reduced-price meals if the household is at or below the guidelines.

**INCOME ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES**

(Effective from July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022)

The income scales below are to be used to determine applicant’s eligibility for free or reduced-price meals if the family is at or below the guideline.

	Annually	Annually	Monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Weekly
Household Size	Free	Reduced	Free	Reduced	Free	Reduced
1	\$16,744	\$23,828	\$1,396	\$1,986	\$322	\$459
2	\$22,646	\$32,227	\$1,888	\$2,686	\$436	\$620
3	\$28,548	\$40,626	\$2,379	\$3,386	\$549	\$782
4	\$34,450	\$49,025	\$2,871	\$4,086	\$663	\$943
5	\$40,352	\$57,424	\$3,363	\$4,786	\$776	\$1,105
6	\$46,254	\$65,823	\$3,855	\$5,486	\$890	\$1,266
7	\$52,156	\$74,222	\$4,347	\$6,186	\$1,003	\$1,428
8	\$58,058	\$82,621	\$4,839	\$6,886	\$1,117	\$1,589
For each additional family member, add	\$5,902	\$8,399	\$492	\$700	\$114	\$162