

MEMORANDUM

To: School Superintendents and Business Managers

From: Division of Child and Adult Nutrition Services

Date: July 13, 2022

RE: School meal applications required for SY 2022-23

Congress did not extend the flexibility for schools to serve *universal* free meals in school year (SY) 2022-23. This flexibility had been in place for several years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

For SY 2022-23, families that may qualify for free or reduced-price meals will need to submit a free and reduced-price meal application. It is important that schools send applications to families early and remind them frequently about the availability of the applications. This will help to ensure students have access to free or reduced-price meals at school without accruing negative meal charges.

The return to charging for school meals means there is increased potential for families to accumulate unpaid meal debt. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) [memo SP 46-2016](#) requires schools to create and publish an unpaid meal charge policy that guides families through how their district handles negative student meal balances.

What schools should know going into SY 2022-23:

- There are no universal free meals. Eligible families must submit a free and reduced-price meal application to access the benefit.
- Schools should inform families of, and assist them with, the application process.
- South Dakota is applying for USDA waiver #26 that will allow eligibility carryover of the most recent benefit determination (free, reduced, or paid eligibility) back to SY 2019-20.
 - Eligibility carryover allows children to maintain their last approved or denied school year eligibility status for up to 30 operating days into SY 2022-23 or until a new eligibility is determined.
 - More information, including examples, can be found in the [June 2022 “Check in with CANS” notes](#).
- Schools should start collecting applications for the new school year as soon as possible after July 1.

- In addition to your normal actions to encourage applications, schools might consider joining summer community activities that allow the school to set up a booth or pass out flyers explaining the benefits of applying.
- Summer meal programs, local assistance offices, community organizations (like the YMCA or Boys and Girls Clubs), and public libraries may provide opportunities to reach a greater number of families.
- Free and reduced meal application approvals will follow normal guidance, which can be found in the [USDA Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#).
- Schools should begin identifying SNAP and TANF eligible children in the iMATCH system starting early July. For instruction on how to make matches before school starts, please review Chapter 3, *Starting the School Year* in the [iMATCH Agency User Manual](#).
- The USDA released a brief list of [frequently asked questions](#), a resource to help schools answer common questions from parents.

There are other resources and food assistance programs available to families during the summer months:

- For other resources and food assistance programs, households can be directed to USDA's National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY (English) or 1-877-8-HAMBRE (Spanish).
- To find free summer meals for kids, households can visit USDA's FIND Meals for Kids site (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/meals4kids>).