

Processing Applications

When families apply/reapply for meal benefits at the beginning of the school year, the free and reduced price applications should be reviewed and eligibility determinations should be made as quickly as possible. If a school has a voluminous amount of applications, they should be reviewed within 10 working days from when they were received. Applications for new or transfer students should be processed before those of returning students. Under no circumstances should the application review process be delayed.

All households must be notified of their eligibility status. This may be accomplished in several ways. If a student has been approved for free or reduced price meal benefits, the school may simply tell the student, call the parent, send a note home with the student, or mail the notification. If the student is denied benefits, the family must be notified in writing and given the opportunity to appeal the decision. The recommended prototype notification letter may be found on page 53 (Attachment VII) of the current "Free and Reduced Price Income Eligibility Policy Information" booklet.

When a student's meal benefit changes from the prior year, the household must be provided a reasonable amount of time to receive the information before the change is implemented, which is usually two or three days. However, if a school mails the family the information, it may take five days depending on mail pickups, weekends, holidays, etc. This does not mean all systems must wait five days before implementing the change. You do however, want to avoid the unpleasant situation that occurs when a child who was free last year, whose household application is reviewed in the morning and put on the computer system at 10:00 a.m. that day as reduced. This results in a child who is not prepared to pay \$.25 which is embarrassing and inappropriate. The determination of "reasonable time" remains the jurisdiction of the school food authority not the computer company that supplies the software you are using.