



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Nutrition
Service

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DATE: August 08, 2014

MEMO CODE: SP 58-2014, CACFP 14-2014, SFSP 20-2014

SUBJECT: 2014 Edition of *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

Attached is the August 2014 version of the *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*. This version replaces the August 2013 manual and incorporates clarifications requested by State agencies and FNS regional offices as well as applicable guidance issued since the last revision. Major changes and clarifications are highlighted throughout the manual. An un-highlighted and highlighted version of the eligibility manual will be available online. Consistent with previous years, the highlighted version will be removed after three months and the un-highlighted version will remain available for use.

Two new areas added to this year's manual are Part 3 Section P: "Independent Review of Applications" and Part 7: "Effective Date of Eligibility Determination". These additions reflect the following guidance issued by FNS since last year's manual:

- SP 51-2014: Eligibility Effective Date for Directly Certified Students, June 19, 2014
- SP 44-2014: Questions and Answers Related to the Independent Review of Applications, April 30, 2014
- SP 11-2014: Effective Date of Free or Reduced Price Meal Eligibility Determinations, December 3, 2014

This year's manual also reinforces the importance of validating an active case number or migrant, homeless, or runaway status prior to certification. The validation process is an important tool that can reduce the household application burden, improve direct certification rates, and increase program integrity. Validation is referenced in Part 3 "Processing Applications" Section C, Section F, and Part 5 "Categorically Eligibility", Section A.

A definition for "Automated Data Matching" was added to Part 1 "Terms Used in this Manual", Section B. This definition provides a general explanation of this direct

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certification method and outlines two of the most common matching processes: State/Central-level and Local/LEA-level. This definition and further clarifications on the direct certification process were included in Part 6 “Direct Certification for Assistance Programs”.

An additional question and answer was added to Part 9 “Verification”, Section P. This question offers additional guidance on what may be considered a “questionable application” under verification for cause.

State agencies are reminded to distribute this memorandum and attachment to program operators immediately. Local educational agencies, school food authorities, and other program operators should direct any questions concerning this guidance to their State agency. State agencies with questions should contact the appropriate FNS Regional office.

Original Signed

Cynthia Long
Deputy Administrator
Child Nutrition Programs

Attachment