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News Release

Colorado Free and Reduced-Price School Meal Policy for 2021-2022 School Year

Determining Eligibility for School Meals

The Colorado Department of Education’s School Nutrition Unit announces the policy for determining eligibility of children who may receive free and reduced-price school meals [or free milk] served under Colorado School Food Authorities that participate in the National School Lunch (NSLP), School Breakfast Programs (SBP), and/or Special Milk Program (SMP).

This school year, School Food Authorities may operate the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) allowing all students to eat at no cost regardless of eligibility status. However, free and reduced-price school meal applications will still be distributed, collected, and processed for purposes of determining eligibility for the Pandemic Electronic Benefits (P-EBT) program. Contact your school or district to find out if they are operating SSO this school year.

Families are highly encouraged to complete the free or reduced-price school meal applications to qualify for Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT benefits). For more information about P-EBT visit: <https://cdhs.colorado.gov/p-ebt>.

Local school officials will use the following household size and income criteria for determining eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals.

Household Size	Free Guidelines	Reduced Guidelines
	Yearly	Yearly
1	\$16,744	\$23,828
2	\$22,646	\$32,227
3	\$28,548	\$40,626
4	\$34,450	\$49,025
5	\$40,352	\$57,424
6	\$46,254	\$65,823
7	\$52,156	\$74,222
8	\$58,058	\$82,621
For each additional family member add:	\$5,902	\$8,399

Children from families whose income is at or below the levels shown are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals for schools or districts operating the NSLP. Schools or districts operating SSO can continue to provide meals at no cost no matter a student’s eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals.



How to Apply

Applications for free and reduced-price school meals, instructions and an informational letter to households are available at your local school and/or school district office. Only one application is required for all children in the household. The information provided on the application is confidential and will be used only for the purpose of determining eligibility for either school meals or P-EBT and verifying data. Immigration, migrant, citizenship or refugee status is not required to be provided during the application process, and households should continue to apply for free or reduced-price school meals. The application does require the last four numbers of a Social Security number or an indication that there is no Social Security number. Social Security number information is not reported to any organization outside of your school and/or school district.

Applications from households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) benefits or Temporary Assistance for Needy Family (TANF/Colorado Works, Basic Cash Assistance or State Diversion) benefits need to provide the respective case number and the signature of an adult household member. Eligibility for free school meals is extended to all children in the household when the application provides a case number for any household member.

Households that qualify based on income must provide the names of all household members related or not (such as grandparents, other relatives or friends), the amount of gross income each household member receives, the frequency and source of pay, the signature of an adult household member and the last four digits of that adult household member's Social Security number—or check the box if the adult household member does not have a social security number. School district or program officials may verify the information on the application at any time during the school year.

Households with children who are eligible under the Head Start, homeless, migrant, or runaway programs should contact the school for assistance in receiving meal benefits. To complete an application, the household must mark the relevant box to indicate their appropriate eligibility and the signature of an adult household member is required.

Foster children who are under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court are eligible for free school meals. Any foster child in the household is eligible for free school meals regardless of income. If a household has only foster children in the home and wishes to apply for free school meals, the application should be completed using the instructions for *households with foster children only*. If a household has foster and non-foster children living with them and wishes to apply for free school meals, the application should be completed using the instructions for *households with foster and non-foster children residing in the home*. Including foster children as household members may help other children in the household qualify for school meal benefits. If the foster family is not eligible to receive school meal benefits, it does not prevent a foster child from receiving free school meals.

An application cannot be approved unless it contains complete eligibility information as indicated on the application and instructions. Approved applications will also be considered for a households P-EBT eligibility.

When determined by the school district, that members of a household are receiving assistance from SNAP, TANF or FDPIR, households will be notified of their children's eligibility for free school meals. If the household receives such notice, no application is required for free or reduced-price school meal benefits. If any children in the household were not listed on the eligibility notice or not listed on the application, the household should contact the district to have benefits extended to all children in the household.

When determined by the school district, that an individual child is categorized as homeless, migrant, or runaway or is enrolled in an eligible Head Start program, households will be notified of the child's eligibility for free school meals. For any children not listed on the eligibility notice, the household should contact the



school district about eligibility under one of these programs or should submit an application for other children.

The school district will notify households of their children's eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals. The eligibility is valid for the current school year and a carryover period of up to 30 operating days into the next school year. When the carryover period ends, unless the household is notified that their children are directly certified or the household submits an application that is approved, the school will not send a reminder or a notice of expired eligibility and the children must pay full price for school meals. Households notified of their children's eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals must contact the school district if they choose to decline meal benefits.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) participants may be eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Please contact your school district.

Under the provision of the free and reduced-price school meal policy, the designated determining official for each Colorado school food authority will review applications and determine eligibility. If a household is dissatisfied with the decision, a request may be made to discuss the decision with the determining official. A formal request for a hearing to appeal the decision of the determining official may be made orally or in writing to the designated district hearing official. Contact the local school and/ or district office for the name, address and phone number of the designated hearing official. Each school district has a copy of the complete free and reduced-price school meal policy, which may be reviewed by any interested party. The policy contains an outline of the hearing procedure.

Applications may be submitted at any time during the school year. The household may complete an application if any household member(s) have a decrease in income, become unemployed, have an increase in family size, become eligible for SNAP, TANF or FDPIR benefits or become categorically eligible.

If you are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, you may be eligible for Pandemic-EBT and SNAP. For more information on Pandemic-EBT please visit: <https://cdhs.colorado.gov/p-ebt>.

For more information on SNAP please visit: <https://coloradopeak.secure.force.com> or <https://www.colorado.gov/cdhs/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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