

**MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NEW GUIDELINES ON FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH**

NEWS RELEASE

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Income guidelines for free and reduced lunch announced

Jackson, MS- The Mississippi Department of Education announce the United States Department of Agriculture income guidelines for free and reduced price meals served under the School Lunch, School Breakfast, After School Snack Program, and Food Distribution Programs. Families with children in any of these facilities who are unable to pay the full price of the meals are encouraged to apply for benefits.

Meal applications and instructions

Meal applications and instructions for applying for meal benefits are sent home with each student during registration or on the first day of attendance. To apply for the meal benefits, each household should fill out the application and return it to the school or institution. Additional copies of the application are available at the administrative office of each facility.

Eligibility Determination

For the school/institution officials to determine eligibility, the household must report income information or provide a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) formerly the Food Stamp Program or TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) or FDPIR (Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations) case number. If the child receives TANF payments or is a member of a SNAP household, or a member of a FDPIR household, the parent or guardian has to provide only the name of the child, SNAP or TANF or FDPIR case number, and sign the application, in order for the child to receive free meals. Homeless, migrant, or runaway youth are categorically eligible for free meals.

Information required

Other applicants must report household income identified by source, such as earnings, welfare and alimony received by each household member. In order for income applicants to be approved, the household must provide the following on the application: the names of all household members, each household member's monthly income identified by source; the signature of an adult household member certifying that the information provided is correct; and the social security number of an adult who signs the application or an indication that this adult household member does not have a social security number. The information provided by the household is confidential and will be used only for purposes of determining eligibility and verifying data. The information provided may be verified at any time during the year by the school/institution or program officials.

Rules on Household Income Disclosures are changed

Households are no longer required to report increases in household income of over \$50 per month or \$600 per year and decreases in household size. If a household member becomes unemployed or if the household size increases, the household should contact the school/institution. Such changes may make the children of the household eligible for reduced price or free meals. Households may apply for benefits at any time during the year as circumstances change.

Foster children

In certain cases, foster children are also eligible for meal benefits. If a household has foster children living with them and wishes to apply for meal benefits for them, the household should contact the school/institution for more information.

Every school must provide copies of meal policies

Each school/institution has a copy of their approved free and reduced price meal policy. The policy indicates who is responsible for determining eligibility. The determining official is, in most instances, the principal, the food service administrator, or the program director. Each school/school district/institution has an individual named as the hearing official.

What to do when parents or guardians dissatisfied

Parents or guardians dissatisfied with the ruling of the determining official may wish to discuss the decision with the determining official on an informal basis. Parents wishing to make a formal appeal may make a request either orally or in writing to the hearing official. The school/institution office or the superintendent's office can provide you with the name, address, and phone number of the hearing official.

Discrimination prohibited; Appeal process

In accordance with Federal law and U. S. Department of Agriculture policy, each institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write:

USDA
Director, Office of Civil Rights
Room 326-W
Whitten Building
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
or call 1-800-795-3272 (voice) or 202-720-6382 (TDD).
USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Children from households whose income is at or below the levels shown are eligible for free or reduced price meals.