



Alternate Application for Free and Reduced Eligibility

Background

School Food Authorities (SFAs) that operate the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) are not required to process free and reduced applications for meal benefits. This is because the program uses eligibility from Direct Certification, a state system that identifies students who are automatically approved for free meals due to SNAP, TANF, certain levels of Medicaid, and foster, homeless, or migrant status.

The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) has other programs and opportunities that rely on individual student eligibility information. This data is collected by IDOE and used for allocating funding, reducing fees, providing grant opportunities, etc. For this reason, CEP SFAs are highly encouraged to process alternate applications for free and reduced eligibility to determine individual eligibility for any student who isn't already Direct Certified.

Important Reminders

- District-wide CEP SFAs may not use the Federal Free and Reduced Application and must use the alternate application.
- All CEP schools must inform households that their eligibility determination will have no impact on the free breakfasts and lunches their students receive.
- Since applications are not processed for federal meal benefits, the school food service account cannot be used to cover the costs associated including labor, technology, and materials. Funds from a non-federal account (such as the general fund) must cover these administrative costs.
- Direct Certification and the alternate application for free and reduced benefits are the only methods SFAs can use to determine individual free and reduced eligibility. Locally created applications, household self-reporting, or other unapproved methods cannot be used.

Application Process

Alternate applications, parent letter and instructions, and notification letters can be found on the [CEP webpage](#). Applications cannot be distributed and processed until July 1. The application is only valid for that school year. Households need to annually apply to determine their most current free or reduced eligibility. There is no verification requirement, however SFAs are encouraged to verify applications for cause to maintain the integrity of the free and reduced process.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Are CEP schools required to distribute and process alternate applications for free and reduced eligibility?**

While CEP schools are not required to distribute and process alternate applications, they are highly encouraged to do so in order to have the most up-to-date individual eligibility for IDOE, local programs, and other opportunities.

2. Our school does not operate the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), are we allowed to use the alternate application?

Yes, non-[Child Nutrition Program](#) operators are allowed to use the alternate application and accompanying documents to determine individual free and reduced eligibility.

3. How about Direct Certification, can non-NSLP operators have access to direct certification data?

Only SFAs that operate the National School Lunch Program can have access to this system and its data because there is a joint permanent agreement that is signed between the state agency and the SFA for use of the system. Additionally SFAs are required to obtain annual training and are regularly monitored through reporting and reviews.

4. What has changed between Program Year (PY) 2024-2025 and PY 2025-2026?

In PY 2024-2025, SFAs had the option to use the Federal Free and Reduced Application or the Alternate Application (with Summer EBT signature or without). Depending on the version they picked, the SFA could use the non-profit food service account to cover the administrative costs. For PY 2025-2026, Indiana is not participating in the Summer EBT program, therefore the Summer EBT signature line has been removed from the application. Since the application no longer has any federal programs attached to it, it is now a state form. Therefore, administrative costs can no longer be covered with funds from the non-profit school food service account.

5. It looks like some of the documents are Google Docs, how can I make changes on those?

There are two options to have revision capabilities with Google Docs, the first is to click File and then Make a Copy which will create a copy of the document to the local Google Drive. The other option is to click File and then Download into your preferred format.

6. Where can I view training on the free and reduced process?

Fact sheets and manuals on the free and reduced process can be found on the [Free and Reduced webpage](#). Additionally, virtual webinars are posted in [Moodle](#) under the School Nutrition section. View the Free and Reduced Course (enrollment code: SCN).

7. We do plan to conduct verification on the alternate apps, where can I view training on that process?

For training on verification, visit the [Verification and Direct Verification webpage](#). Additionally, virtual webinars are posted in [Moodle](#) under the School Nutrition section. View the Verification Course (enrollment code: SCN).

8. Who do I contact with questions?

Submit questions through the [CNPweb Help Form](#).