



Important Information for Grandparents and Other Caregivers about Free School Meals

Automatic free school meals: Many children are eligible for free school meals under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) when the child meets one of the following situations:

- Receives TANF (cash assistance) benefits, or lives with a sibling who receives TANF
- Receives SNAP (food stamp) benefits, or lives with a sibling who receives SNAP or
- Is a child in foster care, is homeless or a member of a migrant family

Children who meet any of the above should be **automatically approved** (called “direct certification”) for free school meals if the school participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). In these situations, the parent or adult caregiver does not need to file a paper NSLP application for free school meals because of the “direct certification” process.

Other children also qualify for automatic free school meals if they live in a state with a special USDA Medicaid pilot,* the child receives Medicaid and has gross income under 133% of the poverty level. (Note -the income of non-adoptive caregivers does not count for Medicaid).

Application for free/reduced price meals: If you are low-income household but do not meet the above rules – you can still **apply for free or reduced price meals for the child in your care.**

Your local school should provide you with a NSLP form to complete. For more information, go here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/nslp/national-school-lunch-program-nslp> You can apply at ANY time during the school year, including if household income drops or family members with income leave. What you need to know:

- Free school meals are provided if the household has income under 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL).
- Reduce price meals are provided if income is between 130% and 185% FPL.

Note: The income of all household members who share living expenses is counted in determining a child’s eligibility for free or reduced price meals- even if no legal adoption of the child.



*The 19 states that currently participate in one of the USDA Medicaid Direct Certification Pilot to certify children for free school meals include: CA, CT, FL, IL, IN, IO, KY, MA, MI, NB, NY, NV, PA, UT, VI, WA, TX, WI, WV plus D.C.



Your Rights:

If the child you are raising is NOT getting free or reduced-price meals, and you think the school made a mistake, you can:

1. Speak immediately with the school nutrition director or principal. Ask them to check the data again to confirm your child gets Medicaid, SNAP or TAFDC and approve free meal status if eligible.
2. Request a fair hearing if your application for free or reduced price meals is denied. Under the National School Lunch Program rules, you have a right to ask for a hearing to review this decision.
3. Contact a local Legal Services office or child nutrition advocate for advice or referrals.

