

## **Free and Reduced Meal Program**

Applications for free and reduced price meals for each school year will be distributed to all families with registration materials and are available during the entire school year.

Applications will be also be available four weeks before the start of the next school year (sometime in mid-July) at the District Office and online at the Districts web site. Applications will not be accepted before that time.

\*Please note that until your application has been approved any meals provided are the responsibility of the parent/guardian.

## **Free and Reduced Meal Program F.A.Q.**

**Do I need to fill out an application for each child?** No. Use the one Free and Reduced-Price School Meals Application for all students in your household. An application that is not complete cannot be approved, so be sure to fill out all required information. Please return the completed application to your cafeteria manager.

**Who can get free meals?** All children in households receiving benefits from SNAP or TANF can get free meals, regardless of your income. Your children can also get free meals if your household's gross income is within the free limits on the Federal Income-Eligibility Guidelines. **STOP!** If you have received a **NOTICE OF DIRECT CERTIFICATION** for free meals, do not complete the application, but DO let the school know if any children in your household are not listed on the Notice of Direct Certification letter you received

**Can foster children get free meals?** Yes, foster children who are under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court, are eligible for free meals.

**Can homeless, runaway, migrant and Head Start children get free meals?** Yes, children who meet the definition of homeless, runaway, migrant or are enrolled in a federal Head Start program are eligible for free meals. If you believe children in your household meet these definitions and have not been told your children will get free meals, please contact the Food Service Director at 815-732-5300 ext. 2118 for further information.

**Who can get reduced-price meals?** Your children can get reduced-price meals if your household income is within the reduced-price limits on the Federal Eligibility Income Chart shown on the next page. .

**Should I fill out an application if I received a letter this school year saying my children are approved for free meals?** No, but please read the letter you received very carefully and follow the instructions. Call the Food Service Director at 815-732-5300 ext. 2118 if you have questions.

**My child's application was approved last year. Do I need to fill out a new one?** Yes. Your child's application is only good for that school year and for the first few days of this school

year. You must send a new application unless the school told you that your child is eligible for the new school year.

**I get WIC. Can my children get free meals?** Children in households participating in WIC MAY be eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Please send in an application.

**Will the information I give be checked?** Written proof may be requested from you during the annual Verification process.

**If I do not qualify now, may I apply later?** Yes, you may apply at any time during the school year. For example, children with a parent or guardian who becomes unemployed may become eligible for free or reduced-price meals if the household income drops below the income limit.

**What if I disagree with the school's decision about my application?** You should talk to school officials. You also may ask for a hearing by calling 815-732-5300 or writing to:  
Thomas Mahoney  
206 South 10<sup>th</sup> St  
Oregon, IL 61061

**May I apply if someone in my household is not a U.S. citizen?** Yes. You or your children do not have to be U.S. citizens to qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

**Who should I include as members of my household?** You must include all people living in your household, related or not (such as grandparents, other relatives or friends) who share income and expenses. You must include yourself and all children living with you. If you live with other people who are economically independent, do not include them. For example, people who you do not support, who do not share income with you or your children, and who pay a prorated share of expenses.

**What if my income is not always the same?** List the amount that you normally receive. For example, if you normally make \$1,000 each month, but you missed some work last month and only made \$900, put down that you make \$1,000 per month. If you normally get overtime, include it, but do not include it if you only work overtime sometimes. If you have lost a job or had your hours or wages reduced, use your current income.

**We are in the military. Do we include our housing allowance as income?** If you get an off-base housing allowance, it must be included as income. However, if your housing is part of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, do not include your housing allowance as income.

**My spouse is deployed to a combat zone. Is his/her combat pay counted as income?**  
No, if the combat pay is received in addition to his/her basic pay because of his/her deployment and it was not received before he/she was deployed, combat pay is not counted as income.  
Contact your school for more information

**Does my kindergarten student need an application?**

Benefits can be extended temporarily to kindergarten siblings for the first thirty school days. School Nutrition has to know who these students are. A form can be completed at kindergarten registration or you can notify our office at 815-732-5300.

However, parents are required to complete a new application each school year. The names of all children (including kindergartners) should be written on the new application.

**How long will it take for my application to be processed?**

It can take five days to approve your application. Students are expected to pay full price for meals. Parents are responsible for all charges until the application has been approved.

**Why does my child have charges?**

Your child may have purchased an a la carte item that is not free. Also when an application approval date expires, a free or reduced student without payment for meals will accrue charges and the parents are liable for these charges.

**What if my child's status changes?**

A student who changes from free to reduced or full pay will be given 10 calendar days and written notice of the date of this change. A student who changes from full pay or reduced to free will be changed immediately to the increased benefit.

**What if I do not have a social security number?**

You must include the last four digits of the social security number of the adult household member who signs the application. If you do not have a social security number, you must mark the box on the application informing us that you do not have one.

**I did not fill out an application and my child is free or reduced?**

Your child may also be direct certified through the State Department of Family and Children Services. Counselors and principals may apply for students known to be eligible.

**What does it mean if I am Direct Certified?**

Direct Certified students automatically receive free meals for the entire year. This means you have a Snap or TANF number. You may call us to remove your child from the free and reduced program if you do not want this benefit.

