# Free and Reduced Meals

# picture of a paper meal application

# Families Apply Online

On July 1st an email will be shared with all schools that will include a direct link for families to apply online for Free and Reduced Meal Applications. After families apply for meals, each student receives a FRL status (Free or Reduced Lunch) status which is based upon income and household size. More FRL statuses may provide schools with more title 1 federal funding and make them more eligible for certain federal programs and grants.

# Processing Meal Applications

Once a family fills out a meal application it may need to be processed manually while some meal applications are automatically processed. Meal Applications will be processed every day or every other day in the beginning of the school year. From the middle of the school year to the end, applications are processed weekly. The Colorado Department of Education allows 10 days for a meal application to be processed. Once the meal application is processed the family will receive a Meal Eligibility Letter which lets the family know if they qualify for free, reduced, or paid status. Under Healthy School Meals for all, students will all eat free regardless of status.

# Sending out Meal Eligibility Letters

Families have the option of inputting an email address or home address in order to receive their Meal Eligibility Letter. If an email address is not input in, then the letter will have to be printed and distributed to the family. This is done at the school level, and a designated contact will receive meal eligibility letters that need to be printed and distributed.

# Inputting Paper Applications

Schools must have paper applications available for families to fill out. If a school receives a paper application, it must immediately be inputted online on behalf of the parent. The school must then keep this application on file in a locked drawer for five years for auditing purposes.

# Sharing of FRL statuses

Student information and FRL statuses are confidential and on a need-to-know basis. This information should not be openly shared on email. Most often, parental consent is required prior to sharing FRL statuses. Please see [linked documentation](https://www.cde.state.co.us/node/43988) regarding when parental consent is required and when it is not.

# Meal Application Types

There are three application types: Meal Application, Income or FEDS (Family Economic Data Survey) form, and Combination form. Combination forms are a combination of meal applications and FEDS forms. The type of form you will use may depend on if you are CEP (Community Eligibility Provision) or not. Your SFA (School Food Authority) will make sure you are using the correct meal application type.

# Direct Certification

# Direct certification for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a process that automatically enrolls eligible students for free or reduced-price meals without requiring a household application. Schools use data from government assistance programs (like SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid) to directly certify students, ensuring that eligible children receive meal benefits efficiently and reducing paperwork for families and schools. This process is done at the beginning of every month and FRL statuses are updated into Primero Edge at that time as well.

# Disclosure Statement

Every year, staff that are requesting access to FRL information or are using Primero Edge (and will have access to FRL information) need to fill out a disclosure statement. A disclosure statement under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a document that outlines how a school or district will protect and manage students' personal information obtained through free and reduced-price meal applications. It specifies who can access the data, how it will be used, and the conditions under which it may be shared, ensuring compliance with confidentiality regulations.

# Support/Questions?

If families need any assistance with meal applications or if you have any questions, please reach out to Maggie Necaise at MaggieNecaise@csi.state.co.us