

# Determining Foster Children’s Eligibility for Free Meals or Milk in the School Nutrition Programs and Summer Food Service Program

This document summarizes the methods for determining eligibility of foster children for free meals or free milk in the [school nutrition programs](#) and free meals in the [Summer Food Service Program \(SFSP\)](#). For additional guidance, refer to modules 2 and 3 of the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) training program, [Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs and Summer Food Service Program](#).

## Methods of Determining Eligibility

Determining officials may use two methods to determine if a foster child is eligible to receive free meals or milk. These include the household application and direct certification. [Table 1](#) provides an overview of these methods and the considerations for determining eligibility.

- The **determining official** (DO) is the person designated by the local educational agency (LEA) to review and approve the free and reduced-price meal or free milk applications.
- **Foster children** are children whose care and placement is the responsibility of the State or who are formally placed by a court with a relative or other caretaker household, and the State retains legal custody of the child.

## Household Application

Foster children are eligible for free benefits when the parent or guardian checks the “Foster” box in Step 1 of the [Application for Free and Reduced-priced Meals or Free Milk](#), and the rest of the application is complete.

A foster child’s application for free meals is subject to the formal verification process and is included with the applications to be considered for verification. Verification is the confirmation of eligibility for free or reduced-price benefits in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or School Breakfast Program (SBP).



**STEP 1** List ALL children who are infants and students up to and including grade 12. If more spaces are required for additional names, attach another page. (Sheet of paper.)

Definition of Household Member: "Anyone who is living with you and shares income and expenses, even if not related." Children in Foster care and children who meet the definition of Homeless or Runaway are eligible for free meals. Read How to Apply for Free and Reduced-price School Meals for more information.	Child's First Name	MI	Child's Last Name	School	Grade	Student?		Foster	Head Start	Homeless or Runaway
	Yes	No								
	A		Child	ABC Elementary	3	X		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	B		Child	XYZ High School	10	X		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
								<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
								<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
								<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Check all that apply

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## Direct Certification

Foster children are eligible for free benefits when they are directly certified. Direct certification is the process of determining children eligible for free or reduced-price meals or free milk based on documentation obtained by the LEA directly from appropriate state or local agencies or other authorized individuals. In most cases, direct certification should not involve the household. Communication should be between an applicable state agency or program or other authorized individuals and the LEA. Children who are directly certified for free or reduced-price meals or free milk are not required to submit an application and are not subject to the formal verification process.

## Mixed Households

Mixed households are households that include children designated as Other Source Categorically Eligible and children who are not. Other Source Categorically Eligible children are eligible for free benefits and include foster, homeless, runaway and Head Start children. With mixed households, the eligibility of children who are not Other Source Categorically Eligible is determined based on the application’s household size and total income. As a result, one household application could have two different eligibility determinations.

## Adopted Foster Children

Foster children who are adopted are no longer categorically eligible for free meals as a foster child. However, due to year-long eligibility, the free eligibility status of an adopted foster child does not change within the current school year or the carryover period (up to 30 operating days in the subsequent school year). For more information on the carryover requirements, refer to the CSDE’s resource, [Carryover versus Transfer of a Child’s Eligibility](#).

For subsequent school years, the LEA must determine the eligibility of an adopted child based on the economic unit. When making an eligibility determination, the LEA must count all income available to that household including any adoption assistance. If the adoption is a “subsidized” adoption, which may include children with special needs, the subsidy is included in the total household income. Eligibility is based on the household size and income.

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## Overview of Methods and Considerations for Determining Foster Children’s Eligibility for Free Meals or Milk

### HOUSEHOLD SUBMITS APPLICATION: Subject to the formal verification process

#### Considerations

- Households with foster and non-foster children may choose to include the foster child as a household member. If the foster child is included as a household member, any personal income earned by the foster child must be included on the household application. This streamlines the application process and may help the foster family’s non-foster children qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on household size and income. The foster child is categorically eligible for free meals regardless of the eligibility of the foster family’s non-foster children.
- The foster child’s free eligibility does not extend to other children in the household. The determining official must make an eligibility determination for non-foster children based on the total household’s income (including personal income earned by the foster child, if any) and household size.
- The foster child’s free eligibility does not extend to other children in the household.
- Foster payments received by the family from the placing agency are not considered income and do not need to be reported.

### DIRECT CERTIFICATION: Not subject to the formal verification process

Direct certification	Considerations
Name appears as OT (foster child) on the Direct Certification List	The foster child’s free eligibility does not extend to other children in the household.
DO obtains a copy of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) 603 form for current school year	The foster child’s free eligibility does not extend to other children in the household. The DCF 603 form must be from the current school year.
LEA’s point of contact provides the DO with a list of foster students	The foster child’s free eligibility does not extend to other children in the HH.

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## Resources

Application Forms for Free and Reduced Meals and Milk (“Application Forms” section of CSDE’s Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/application-forms>

Carryover versus Transfer of a Child’s Eligibility (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/carryover\\_versus\\_transfer\\_of\\_child\\_eligibility\\_snp.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/carryover_versus_transfer_of_child_eligibility_snp.pdf)

Direct Certification for School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/direct-certification>

Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs (CSDE webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs>

Eligibility Manual for School Meals (USDA):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/usda\\_eligibility\\_manual.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/usda_eligibility_manual.pdf)

Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs and Summer Food Service Program: Module 2: Processing Applications (“Determining Eligibility Training” section of CSDE’s Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/determining-eligibility-training>

Determining Eligibility in the School Nutrition Programs and Summer Food Service Program: Module 3: Direct Certification (“Determining Eligibility Training” section of CSDE’s Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/determining-eligibility-training>

Guidance for Notifying Parents of a Child’s Free or Reduced-Price Eligibility (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/guidance\\_notifying\\_parents\\_child\\_eligibility\\_free\\_reduced\\_meals.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/guidance_notifying_parents_child_eligibility_free_reduced_meals.pdf)

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Parent and Guardian Notification Letters (“Parent and Guardian Notification Letters” section of CSDE’s Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/parent-and-guardian-notification-letters>

Procedures for Processing Free and Reduced-price Meal Applications with a SNAP or TFA Number (CSDE):

[https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/processing\\_free\\_reduced\\_meal\\_applications\\_providing\\_snap\\_tfa\\_number.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/forms/freered/processing_free_reduced_meal_applications_providing_snap_tfa_number.pdf)

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For more information, refer to the USDA's [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](#) and visit the CSDE's [Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Milk in School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsfp/forms/freered/foster\\_children\\_eligibility\\_snp\\_sfsp.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsfp/forms/freered/foster_children_eligibility_snp_sfsp.pdf).

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1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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