

**The first and most important step a school can take to minimize cash collection challenges is to collect and enter applications for meal programs as close to the beginning of the school year as possible.** All students are expected to pay for meals until forms are processed and eligibility is determined. Please note that applications are accepted throughout the school year, but eligibility is not retroactive. If you think a student is mis-categorized, you may resubmit an application at any time.

Listed below are best practices that schools across New York City have followed with great success:

School Meals Applications	Cash Collection: School Opening	Cash Collection: Ongoing
Distribute applications on the first day of school through each classroom teacher. Consider making application completion students' first homework assignment of the year. Be sure to have a sufficient number of extra applications to replace lost forms.	Communicate the policy for September at the end of the previous school year and through any parent communication over the summer.	Use SchoolFood tools such as <a href="#">sample letter and billing log</a> to provide parents with student specific information on cash due. Send letters home monthly.
Encourage parents to submit meal applications online through <a href="#">ACCESS NYC</a> .	Assign a point person on your staff to oversee the entire meal application and cash handling process.	Email cash balance reminders to parents every week indicating how many meals their children have eaten and how much is due.
Use school orientation sessions to offer assistance to parents in completing the form.	Use school orientation to clearly communicate responsibility of parents to pay for meals if their child is reduced or full-price eligible or has not yet submitted a form.	Use Parent Teacher Conferences, Know Your School Night, and Parent Association meetings as an opportunity to meet with the parents who owe funds. Be prepared with full accounting of meals eaten and cash due for each student.
Have your Parent Coordinator provide assistance in completing applications.	Establish a consistent cash-collection method. Many schools find it effective to collect monthly. Establish your method in September and clearly inform parents of your payment schedule and their responsibilities.	Include reminders of payment requirements in newsletters and on the school's website
Have a class contest:  SchoolFood can provide a pizza party for each class that returns 100 percent of applications.	Make parents aware of the impact that their failure to pay will have on your school.	Create a specific collection methodology for "Pizza Friday" and list as a separate item in collection outreach. (Lunch participation is traditionally much higher on Fridays.)
Process applications as soon as they come in.	Ask your network leader to refer you to other schools in your network that are successfully collecting all school meal cash.	Ensure that Parent Coordinator is fully aware of collection schedule and can communicate requirements to parents.