



Principal's Best Practices

Maximize the Collection of School Meal Applications and Increase School Funding

The first and most important step a school can take to maximize their Title-1 funding and minimize cash collection challenges is to collect the School Meal Applications as close to the beginning of the school year as possible. All students who do not qualify for free or reduced priced meals are expected to pay for meals served until eligibility is determined. Please note that free eligibility is **not** retroactive. Families that qualify for free meals after the first day of school will be required to pay for meals served in the full priced category.

Online applications are processed within 24 hours of submission by the parent, and the school never has to handle a paper form. You can use these best practices to establish a strategy to motivate households to submit their application online.

GENERAL APPLICATION BEST PRACTICES

Review ATS RMEL on the first day of school:

Many students may have already qualified for free or reduced-price meals before the first day of school. This is done through an HRA match or an online application submitted over the summer. These students will be listed on the RMEL as meal code A, 1, 2 or 3 on the first day of school.

School meal applications are not required for these students, focus your efforts on those who need to qualify (Meal Code 5 students).

Focus on the New Students:

Most new students or those in Pre-K and Kindergarten do not have eligibility at the start of the school year. They will be displayed as meal code 5 (full priced) until an application is processed. Families should be asked to complete an online application as quickly as possible to avoid meal charges.

Highlight the monetary incentives that families will receive if they qualify for free or reduced price meals:

- College fee waivers for students
- Tutoring programs
- SAT and AP fee waiver for students

It Takes Team Work:

Have multiple staff engaged in the process. Designate one person to oversee the process, but have your Parent Coordinator, PTA, School Aides, Teachers and Principal inform families that it's quicker and easier to apply for free meals using the online application.

Family Confidentiality

Schools should practice storing the applications in a concealed envelope or locked area, and not leave them unattended as they prepare to submit to SchoolFood. Give the families the assurance that their personal information is protected and will remain confidential throughout the processing of their application.

Household Members with Different Benefits

Benefit can be extended to siblings or other students residing in the same household if one household member receives benefits from an assistance program with Direct Certification.

April - May - Schools should verify siblings as living together in the Student Enrollment Management System (SEMS). SchoolFood will use this data in September to match household members automatically.

All school year- Schools should notify the SchoolFood help desk when students living in the same household have different eligibility, we will match them manually through ATS.

ONLINE APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS

PAPER APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS

Notify Families Early:

Send the applyforlunch.com flyer home with the student's report card at the end of the year requesting that they complete their School Meals Application online in July.

- Use the **ATS generated applyforlunch.com letter** to inform parents of the importance to complete an application online over the summer.

Notify Families Early:

Distribute applications on the first day of school through each classroom teacher. Consider making application completion student's first homework assignment of the year.

Provide a Designated Computer for Families

Find a specific location like the library, computer lab or an office where families can discretely submit an application online at a convenient time.

- Post the **ApplyforLunch.com** flyer near computers which are designated for parents to use.
- Make the internet browser open to ApplyforLunch.com as the home page.

Incomplete Applications Not Yet Submitted to SchoolFood for Processing:

School's designee should review applications before submitting them to SchoolFood for processing. They should make reasonable efforts to contact the household in order to obtain or clarify required information. If updating the application with obtained information, the school official should document the details of the parent contact. They should date and initial all updates on the front of the form.



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ONLINE APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS	PAPER APPLICATION SUBMISSIONS
<p>Use electronic and online media when it's available: Add applyforlunch.com to the following online media if you use them at your school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Official School Website - News and Announcements •School Facebook Page •School Twitter Account •School Email newsletter •PTA Website •PTA Facebook Page • Use Robo-Calling such as with Global Connect 	<p>Incomplete Applications Submitted for Processing: Families who submit an incomplete application that is processed by SchoolFood should not be instructed to complete a second application. Schools can collect the information from the families and call the SchoolFood Eligibility help desk at (718) 707-4400 to update the missing information over the phone.</p> <p>Schools should use the following ATS reports to identify what is incomplete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •ATS RMEL •ATS generated - Notice of Meal Eligibility Letters
<p>Be Informed: School staff who are responsible for handling lunch forms should be familiar with the online application. This will allow them to help families if they have questions or come to the school to complete one.</p>	<p>Notice of Meal Eligibility Letters: Distribute the Notice of Meal Eligibility Letters as they print automatically from your ATS printer. These letters inform families of their student's eligibility status. If the application was processed as incomplete the letter states the incomplete reason in the designated home language.</p>
<p>Have an Online Application Event: School holds a night or nights when families can fill out online applications at the school.</p>	<p>RMEL Incomplete Reasons: Schools should print the ATS RMEL report with the incomplete reasons which will only print meal code 4 students and will identify the incomplete reasons. Schools should use this information when they follow-up with households to obtain the missing information.</p>
<p>Summer Communications: Continue to communicate with families during the summer requesting that they submit an online application in July.</p>	<p>State Letters- (Students Who Have Already Qualified): Many students will qualify for free meals automatically in August, they will appear with a Meal Code "A" on the ATS RMEL. <i>Do not send</i> SchoolFood the State Education Department (SED) Letters titled <i>Eligibility for Free School Meals/Milk</i> or applications received from students listed as meal code "A" on the first day of school.</p>
<p>Work with your Feeder Schools: Middle Schools and High Schools know which school's graduates will be transferring to their school each year. These "feeder schools" may be participating in the Universal School Meals program (USM) and may not be required to complete applications. This will result in a high number of incoming students defaulting to full priced (meal code 5) on the first day of school.</p> <p>Work with your SchoolFood Manger to identify if your feeder schools are USM. Ask your feeder schools to inform the families of their graduating students to use applyforlunch.com over the summer so that they may qualify for free meals on the first day of the new school year.</p>	<p>State Letters- (Students Who Have Not Yet Qualified): Some students will receive a State Education Department (SED) letter titled, <i>Eligibility for Free School Meals/Milk</i>, but will not be matched as a meal code "A". Check the daily ATS RMEL report and identify the student's current meal code. If the student submitted a SED Letter, and they are not meal code "A", <i>fax the letter</i> to SchoolFood at (718) 349-5463 so that we can expedite the certification of this student eligibility. If they are already meal code "A", return the letter to the family.</p> <p>Inform Families of the Goal Schools should inform families of their goals, i.e., 100% applications collected, increase the funding available to the school, expedited eligibility status and minimize the necessary payments for families who qualify as free and or reduced-priced late. The forum can be newsletters, PTA meetings, teacher's conference, etc.</p>