

Frequently Asked Questions: Meal Applications

1. Who qualifies for free or reduced-price meals?

- All children in households receiving benefits from the following programs:
 - CalFresh/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR)
 - CalWORKs/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
 - Foster children that are under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court
 - Children participating in their school's Head Start program
 - Children who meet the definition of homeless, runaway, or migrant
- Children whose household income is within the limits on the Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines.

2. How do I know if my children qualify as homeless, migrant, or runaway?

- Sharing a home/apartment or renting a room with others due to economic hardship (doubled-up)
- Live in a motel/hotel
- Live in an emergency, transitional or domestic violence shelter
- Live in a car, park, trailer or campground
- Student not living with parents, legal guardian or caretaker (unaccompanied youth)

If you believe children in your household meet these descriptions and haven't been told your children will receive free meals, please call or e-mail Stacy Yogi, Executive Director, State & Federal Programs at 949-234-9244, syogi@capousd.org

3. My child's application was approved last year. Do I need to fill out a new application for this school year?

YES! Your child's application is only good for that school year and for the first few days of this new school year. You must send in a new application for continued benefits unless you received a letter that your child is eligible for the new school year.

4. Do I need to fill out an application for each child?

No. Use one Meal Application for all students in your household. Make sure to include all students in your household on the application. We cannot approve an application that is not complete, so be sure to fill out all required information.

5. Should I fill out an application if I received a letter this school year saying my children are already approved for free meals?

No, but please read your letter carefully and follow the instructions. If any children in your household were missing from your eligibility notification, immediately contact Arlene Badger at 949-234-9503, ajbadger@capousd.org or visit our office located at 32972 Calle Perfecto San Juan Capistrano CA 92675 .

6. I receive WIC benefits. Can my children receive free meals?

Children in households participating in WIC may be eligible for free or reduced price meals. Please send in an application.

7. Will the information I provide be checked?

Yes. We may also ask you to send written proof of the household income you report.

8. 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 and reduced-price meals if the household income drops below the income limit. For example, if a household gains a family member they may become eligible for free and reduced-price meals based on income and increased household size.

9. 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 or writing to:

Kristin Hilleman, Food & Nutrition Services Director II at 949-234-9501
khilleman@capousd.org 32972 Calle Perfecto, San Juan Capistrano CA 92675

10. May I apply if someone in my household is not a U.S. citizen?

Yes. You, your children, or other household members do not have to be U.S. citizens to apply for free or reduced-price meals.

11. What if my income is not always the same?

List the amount that you normally receive. For example, if you normally make \$1000 each month, but you missed some work last month and only made \$900, put down that you made \$1000 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.

12. What if some household members have no income to report?

Household members may not receive some types of income we ask you to report on the application, or may not receive income at all. Whenever this happens, please write a 0 in the field. However, if any income fields are left empty or blank, those will also be counted as zeroes. Please be careful when leaving income fields blank, as we will assume you meant to do so.

13. We are in the military. Do we report our income differently?

Your basic pay and cash bonuses must be reported as income. If you get any cash value allowances for off-base housing, food, or clothing, or receive Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance payments, it must also be included as income. However, if your housing is part of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, do not include your housing allowance as income. Any additional combat pay resulting from deployment is also excluded from income.

14. My family needs more help. Are there other programs we could apply for?

To find out how to apply for (SNAP) or other assistance benefits, contact your local assistance office or call 949-234-9503.

15. My family qualifies for reduced-price meals. What do we pay per meal?

At CUSD, families that qualify for reduced-price meals receive their meals for free!

16. My family qualifies for free meals. Can my students receive breakfast and lunch daily?

Yes! Students that qualify for free or reduced-price meals can receive breakfast and lunch for free daily.

17. Who has access to my meal application?

The information on the Meal Benefits Application will be used by Food & Nutrition Services to determine if your children qualify for free or reduced-price meals. All information is secure and extremely confidential.

18. What is a "directly certified" (DC) student?

Students may be directly certified for meal benefits when they receive certain benefits including SNAP, FDPIR, CalWORKS, TANF or students identified by the district as homeless, Head Start-eligible, migrant or runaways. Foster children may also be directly certified.

19. What do I need to complete an application?

- 7 digit student identification number for each student in your household.
- If you participate in an assistance program you will need to know your case number (not your card or account number).
- If you do not participate in an assistance programs, you will need to report your total household income. In that case...
 - If anyone in your household has a job, you may need to reference the earnings statements or pay stubs to report your gross income, which is different from the amount you actually receive in your paycheck.
 - If anyone receives Social Security or retirement benefits, you may need to gather the benefit statements to report the amount and frequency of the payments.
 - You may also need to reference other financial documents for additional sources of income.

Still not sure if you have everything you need? Don't worry! The income section of the application contains detailed instructions and explanations about the sources of income you must include. You can also call our office at 949-234-9509.

20. How will I be notified if my family qualifies for free or reduced-price meals?

All families that complete a meal application will receive a letter via postal mail stating if their household qualifies for free, reduced-price or paid meals. Letters are mailed to the address on file at your child's school. Parents must make sure the address in their parent portal is correct to ensure they receive their letter.

21. Should I complete an online application or a paper application?

Online applications are preferred; they are contact-free, convenient, and have a quick 24 hour turnaround. Paper applications are available upon request but take 10 business days to process. Apply online at [LunchApplication.com](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/rs/scales2021.asp) or request a paper application from your school's office.

22. Is my student identified as receiving free meals in the cafeteria?

No. Free and reduced-price meal status is highly confidential. Food and Nutrition Services is prohibited from overtly identifying a student's meal status. All students (free, reduced-price and paid status) enter their 7 digit student identification number to receive a meal.

23. Where can I find current income eligibility guidelines?

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/rs/scales2021.asp>

24. Our family will be doing 100% virtual learning this school year. Can we apply for free and reduced-price meals?

Yes! Your family can still qualify for and receive meals as virtual learners.