



Food and
Nutrition
Service

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SUBJECT: Revised Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

Issuing Agency/Office:	FNS/Child Nutrition Programs
Title of Document:	Revised Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals
Document ID:	
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Date of Issuance:	May 10, 2023
Replaces:	SP 28-2017
Summary:	This memorandum provides information on the revised Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals. USDA updated the prototype application to improve the user experience for applicants by adjusting the reading level, streamlining the application instructions, and by adding clarity to the mailing instructions to reduce the number of applications sent to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights.

Attached to this memorandum, please find a revised edition of the Prototype Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals (“prototype application”), with accompanying instructions, a letter to households, and a cover sheet that explains the information burden for the application. These materials have been updated and may be adapted for direct use by State and local agencies, or used as a reference for designing an effective application packet that meets all statutory and regulatory requirements. Note that no regulatory requirements related to the school meal application have changed. Using this revised application form is optional and the materials released in SP 28-2017, *Revised Prototype Free and Reduced Price Application for SY 2017-2018*, and SP 34-2016, *Revised Prototype Free and Reduced Price Application Materials for SY 2016-17*, may still be used.

Motivation for the Updates to the Application Prototype and Instructions

Over the past several years, the USDA Office of Civil Rights has received thousands of free and reduced price school meals applications and related materials. Those submitted applications were intended for the local officials (i.e., school district officials) who make free and reduced price eligibility determinations. USDA forwarded the applications to the appropriate State and local agencies for eligibility determinations, or in some cases, they were returned to the original sender. In an effort to ensure future applications are received in a timely manner by the appropriate authorities, USDA has changed the instructions on the prototype application to highlight the process for returning completed applications to local officials.

Design Changes

In 2017, the U.S. Census Bureau's Center for Survey Measurement (CSM) conducted cognitive interviews and provided expert reviews of the English and Spanish language prototype applications and instructions, and identified ways USDA could improve the experience for households completing the applications. USDA also reviewed the first two *Access, Participation, Eligibility, and Certification* (APEC) studies to ensure that the application prototype and instructions support program integrity. These efforts resulted in a simpler application with more detailed instructions. The application and instructions are 508 compliant, and the application is fillable. Finally, the application contains the most current Nondiscrimination Statement.

Availability of Prototype Free and Reduced Price Application Materials

The revised English and Spanish application prototypes and instructions are currently available on the FNS website at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/applying-free-and-reduced-price-school-meals>. The updated application prototype and instructions meet all the requirements of *Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act*, which ensures that all materials are accessible and usable by all individuals, regardless of ability and can be utilized by assistive technology. More information about the Section 508 requirements can be found here: <https://www.section508.gov/>. The following materials are now available:

- English and Spanish language prototype applications and accompanying instructions in fillable Adobe PDF format. A 508 compliant Microsoft Word version of the application will be hosted on PartnerWeb to support ease of adaptation at the State and local level. If changes are made to the Microsoft Word version of the application, the document may no longer meet the Section 508 requirements, and as a result, this application is only to be used for adaptation at the State and local level for printing purposes.
- Application prototype cover page with burden statement in Microsoft Word format.

Additional translations will be released on a rolling basis and State agencies will be notified via PartnerWeb as the translations become available. The prototype application and instructions will be available in multiple languages, as are currently available, as well as two additional languages (Turkish and Pashto). The existing list of languages can be found here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/translated-applications>. No changes were made to the letter to households, but a letter will be included in Turkish and Pashto when those translations are available.

State agencies are reminded to distribute this memorandum to Program operators immediately. Program operators should direct any questions regarding this memorandum to the appropriate State agency. State agencies with questions should contact the appropriate FNS [regional office](#).

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