

IDEA Public Schools

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Children need healthy meals to learn. This school year, **IDEA Public Schools** can offer healthy meals every school day to all students at no cost. Typically, a student's household must meet income eligibility requirements to qualify for free or reduced-price meals. However, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued guidance that allows schools to offer meals to all students at no cost for the 2021-2022 school year.

While no application or eligibility determination is required for your student to receive free meals this school year, income eligibility requirements will likely resume in the 2022-2023 school year. As such, to establish eligibility for free or reduced-price meals for the 2022-2023 school year, please complete an application for free or reduced-price meals this school year. Please note that if you received a notification letter that a child is directly certified for free or reduced-price meals, do not complete an application. Let the school know if any children in the household attending school are not listed in the letter.

The questions and answers that follow and attached directions provide additional information on how to complete the application. Complete only one application for all the students in the household and return the completed application to **the Cafeteria Manager at your student's school**. If you have questions about applying for free or reduced-price meals, contact **Geena Huerta, CNP Finance Manager**, geena.huerta@ideapublicschools.org, (956) 373-1630.

1. Who Qualifies for Free Meal Status?

- **Income**—Children can get free or reduced-price meals if a household's gross income is within the limits described in the *Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines*.
- **Special Assistance Program Participants**—Children in households receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Food Distribution Program for Households on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), are eligible for free meals.
- **Foster**—Foster children who are under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court are eligible for free meals.
- **Head Start or Early Head Start**—Children participating in these programs are eligible for free meals.
- **Homeless, Runaway, and Migrant**—Children who meet the definition of homeless, runaway, or migrant qualify for free meals. If you haven't been told about a child's status as homeless, runaway, or migrant or you feel a child may qualify for one of these programs, please call or email **Alexis Toussaint, (225) 281-0619**.

2. **What If I Disagree with the School's Decision About My Application?** Talk to school officials. You also may ask for a hearing by calling or writing to **Fernando Aguilar, Fernando.aguilar@ideapublicschools.org, (956) 373-1748**.

3. **What If My Income Is Not Always the Same?** List the amount normally received. If a household member lost a job or had hours/wages reduced, use current income.

4. If I Don't Qualify Now, May I Apply Later? Yes.

Apply at any time during the school year. A child 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.

5. We Are in The Military. Do We Report Our Income Differently? Basic pay and cash bonuses must be reported as income. Any cash value allowances for off-base housing, food, or clothing, or Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance payments count as income. If housing is part of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, do not include the housing allowance as income. Any additional combat pay resulting from deployment is excluded from income.

6. **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.

7. **Will Application Information Be Checked?** Yes. We may also ask you to send written proof of the reported household income.

8. **My Family Needs More Help. Are There Other Programs We Might Apply For?** To find out how to apply for other assistance benefits, contact your local assistance office or 2-1-1.

9. **Can I Apply Online?** Yes! The online application has the same requirements and will ask you for the same information as the paper application. Visit www.schoolcafe.com to begin or to learn more about the online application process. Contact **Geena Huerta, (956) 373-1630** if you have questions about the online application.

If you have other questions or need help, call **Geena Huerta, (956) 373-1630**. Si necesita ayuda, por favor llame al teléfono: **Geena Huerta, (956) 373-1630**.

Sincerely,

IDEA Public Schools-Cafeteria Managers