



# COLORADO

## Department of Education

# 2023 At-Risk Count Audit Resource Guide

## Fiscal Year 2023-2024

Submitted to:

Colorado Public School Districts, Charter Schools, Charter School Collaboratives, Charter School Networks, The Charter School Institute (CSI) and Colorado Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)

By:

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*\*This Guide was updated September 5, 2023 to clarify extended eligibility information; see page 10 for updates.*

*\*\*This Guide was modified September 13, 2023 to update the contact person for Variance Waiver requests; see page 10 for updates.*

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## Statutory Authority

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[Section 22-54-103, C.R.S.](#), grants the state board authority to “make reasonable rules and regulations necessary for the administration and enforcement” of the Public School Finance Act of 1994.

The Rules for the Administration of the Public School Finance Act of 1994 are published in [1 CCR 301-39](#).

[Colorado Revised Statutes](http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/colorado/) (<http://www.lexisnexis.com/hottopics/colorado/>)

[Code of Colorado Regulations](http://www.sos.state.co.us/CCR/Welcome.do) (<http://www.sos.state.co.us/CCR/Welcome.do>)

*You must open your browser to “[Colorado Legal Resources](#)” before clicking any link to a statutory reference.*

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## References

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[Section 22-32-141, C.R.S.](#)

[Section 22-54-109, C.R.S.](#)

[Section 22-54-112\(4\), C.R.S.](#)

[7 CFR 245.6](#)

[School Auditing Office At-Risk Count Website](#)

[http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/auditunit\\_atrisk\\_freeandreduced](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/auditunit_atrisk_freeandreduced)

[School Nutrition Unit School Meal Eligibility Website](#)

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/nutrition/determine-program-eligibility>

[School Nutrition Unit Provisional Programs Guidance](#)

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/nutrition/nutritionalprovisionalprograms>

## Data Privacy and Security

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As a reminder, local education agencies must use secure means when sending Personally Identifiable Information (PII) to CDE. CDE strongly recommends that districts use a secure method of transferring PII between districts, schools, or with other parties (for example, a secure file sharing tool like Syncplicity, or including the PII in a password-protected document).

For more information, please visit the [Data Privacy and Security](#) website at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/dataprivacyandsecurity> or contact [CDE’s Data Privacy Office](#) at [dataprivacy@cde.state.co.us](mailto:dataprivacy@cde.state.co.us).



## Introduction and Overview

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The purpose of the 2023 edition of the At-Risk Count Audit Resource Guide (“Guide”) is to provide helpful information to assist districts in preparing for their at-risk count audit. With the emergence of new technological capabilities, it is recommended whenever possible that districts retain their audit documentation in electronic format.

While this Guide has been developed to conform to state statute and the Code of Colorado Regulations (Administrative Rules), this document is not meant to be comprehensive and is not intended to replace state statute or administrative rules.

All references to “district” or “school district” includes the Charter School Institute (CSI), charter schools, charter school collaboratives, charter school networks, and BOCES. Each organization is encouraged to review all relevant sections of the Guide, state statute, and administrative rules.

Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, in addition to students who qualify for free lunch, students who qualify for reduced-price lunch are included in the at-risk count.

Throughout this document, the ► symbol has been used to denote sections where language has been altered or clarified.



## Data Collection and Audit Process

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Each year, all public school districts across the state of Colorado and the Charter School Institute participate in the Student October Count data submission to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The purpose of this data submission is to obtain student-level data required by state statute, including information regarding students' funding and lunch eligibility status (as outlined in the Public School Finance Act of 1994, as amended). CDE collects this data through the Data Pipeline, with the Data Services Unit of CDE overseeing the collection.

The Student October Count is based on a one-day membership count in which districts are asked to report all students who are actively enrolled and attending classes through their district on that date (the "pupil enrollment count date"). Membership includes only those students who meet requirements as of the pupil enrollment count date; however, the Student October Count data collection opens in September and closes at the end of November. For further information regarding the actual data submission process, please visit the [Data Pipeline Student October Count Snapshot](http://www.cde.state.co.us/datapipeline/snap_studentoctober) website ([http://www.cde.state.co.us/datapipeline/snap\\_studentoctober](http://www.cde.state.co.us/datapipeline/snap_studentoctober)).

Data submitted in the Student October Count data collection is used to determine each district's total program funding, which includes total funded pupil, at-risk, and ELL counts. A district's at-risk funding takes into account the total number of funded students in grades K-12 reported as free or reduced-price lunch eligible. For every student included in a district's Student October Count data submission, the district must report the student's lunch eligibility status. The applicable codes are as follows:

- 00 = Not Eligible
- 01 = Free Lunch Eligible
- 02 = Reduced Lunch Eligible

► Beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, a new required data field has been added to the Student October Count snapshot, "Free Lunch Eligibility Identification," that indicates how free lunch eligible students were identified:

- 0 = Not Identified as Free Lunch Eligible
- 1 = Direct Certification (SNAP, TANF, FDPIR, Medicaid free)—including extension to other household members
- 2 = Other Source Categorical (Migrant, Homeless, Runaway, Foster, Head Start documented participation)—LEA lists, student specific eligibility
- 3 = Application (Application for Free and Reduced-Price Meals, Family Economic Data Survey Form, or Combination form)

In an effort to ensure accurate reporting of those data fields associated with determining total program funding, the School Auditing Office conducts compliance audits of each district's Student October Count data. When conducting the at-risk portion of the compliance audit, a random sample of reported free and reduced-price lunch eligible students is selected for eligibility confirmation.

**Districts must retain all required documentation until audited by CDE or until five years from the certification due date** (November 10), whichever comes first. Special provision schools (CEP and Provision 2) may need to retain documentation for up to nine years, because documentation evidencing free or reduced-price lunch eligibility collected during the first year of participation may be used throughout the CDE-approved provisional cycle for Student October Count reporting purposes. (This is true as long as the special provision students continue to be reported at a special provision school.)



Districts should be prepared to provide all audit documentation in electronic format and to provide a copy of any source documents at the time of the audit. In most cases, districts should be able to generate and save required reports electronically from their nutrition systems or, if needed, scan hard copy documents and save them in an electronic format. **At no time should any documentation containing Personally Identifiable Information (PII) be emailed to CDE.**



## ▶ Healthy School Meals for All

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Pursuant to [HB22-1414](#) and beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, districts may opt-in to participate in the Healthy School Meals for All program (HSMA) which allows districts and schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to provide free meals to all students.

***Districts that choose to opt-in to HSMA will still need to provide student eligibility documentation. Districts must continue to keep records of eligibility and continue to conduct direct certification per existing guidance.***

***While all students attending an opt-in district are eligible to eat meals for free, the opt-in district can only report students as free or reduced-price lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission if it has documentation, as outlined in this Guide, for the reported students evidencing free or reduced-price lunch eligibility.***

***For districts that choose to opt-in to HSMA, and who have schools that are participating in Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), refer to the [Special Assistance Certification and Reimbursement Alternative](#) section of this guide.***

For more information regarding this program, including requirements and resources, visit the [Healthy School Meals for All Program](#) website (<https://www.cde.state.co.us/nutrition/healthy-school-meals-for-all-program>).



## ► NOTICE: Changes to at-risk funding calculations beginning in 2024-2025

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Currently, at-risk counts are based on the total number of funded students in grades kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> who are identified and reported as free or reduced-price lunch eligible as of the pupil enrollment count date in the Student October Count data submission.

However, the recently passed [HB22-1202](#) outlines the implementation of a new at-risk measure that continues to utilize student level data reported through the Student October Count data collection, and will include:

- Percentage of students certified as eligible for free lunch based on receipt of public benefits (SNAP, TANF, Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservation) or categorical eligibility (foster, homeless, migrant, runaway or Head Start);
- Supplemented by the direct certification of students participating in Medicaid or Children’s Basic Health Plan; and
- A neighborhood socioeconomic status index that weighs students’ needs on 5+ socioeconomic status neighborhood factors, linked to each student’s census block group.

While the new at-risk measure was to be implemented starting with the 2023-2024 school year, the School Finance Bill [SB23-287](#) as Amended extends the implementation of the new at-risk factor requirement to the 2024-2025 budget year.

The current process for determining and auditing at-risk counts related to the Total Program funding calculation will continue through 2023-2024 school year. ***However, districts should anticipate that beginning with the 2024-2025 budget year, required audit documentation to support the district’s funded at-risk counts will change.***

For more information regarding the new At-Risk Measure, visit the [At-Risk Measure Working Group](#) website (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/atriskmeasureforschoolfinanceworkinggroup>).





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## Pupil Enrollment Count Date

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The pupil enrollment count date is October 1 of each year, unless that date falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or major religious holiday. If the pupil enrollment count date falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or major religious holiday, the pupil enrollment count date will be the following school day.

The determination of the pupil enrollment count date shall not be affected by a district's decision to not have school on the pupil enrollment count date.

### **2023 Pupil Enrollment Count Date: Monday, October 2, 2023**

All current-year documentation evidencing free and reduced-price lunch eligibility must be received on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date in order for the district to report a student as free or reduced-price lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission.

In the event a district or school is approved for an alternative count date, all documentation evidencing free and reduced-price lunch eligibility (in this instance) should be received between July 1 and the alternative pupil enrollment count date for the current school year.

Throughout this Guide, in the event a district or school has been granted an alternative count date, said date should be used wherever "pupil enrollment count date" is referenced.

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## Audit Documentation Requirements

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For the purpose of the at-risk audit, districts must be prepared to provide documentation to support any funded students' free or reduced-price lunch eligibility, as reported in the Student October Count data submission.

Acceptable documentation to support a student's free or reduced-price lunch eligibility includes:

- Complete direct certification List
  - SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)
  - TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)
  - Migrant students
  - ► Medicaid
- Applications for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals
- Family Economic Data Survey (FEDS) forms
- Categorical Eligibility determination lists (such as district-created migrant, homeless, Head Start, runaway, and/or foster child lists)

All documentation submitted to the School Auditing Office during the at-risk lunch count audit will be evaluated based on criteria outlined in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) [Eligibility Manual for School Meals](https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/cn/SP36_CACFP15_SFSP11-2017a1.pdf) (https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/cn/SP36\_CACFP15\_SFSP11-2017a1.pdf). As a reminder (and as outlined in the Rules for the Administration of the Public School Finance Act of 1994), all current-year documentation evidencing free or reduced-price lunch eligibility must be dated on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date for the year being evaluated, unless the use of the [Carryover Provision](#) is allowable and appropriate.



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## Carryover Provision

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As described in the USDA's Eligibility Manual for School Meals, an individual student's eligibility from the previous school year (before July 1) carries over for up to 30 school days into the new school year, or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever comes first. Therefore, if the pupil enrollment count date falls within the first 30 school days of the current year, the district may utilize documentation from the prior school year ("carryover documentation") to evidence a student's lunch eligibility status. Carryover of the previous year's lunch eligibility status must be evidenced with adequate audit documentation (as outlined in this Guide). ***Because the new eligibility determination supersedes the carryover eligibility, documentation from the prior year can only be used in the absence of current-year documentation evidencing any lunch status.***

In cases where students transfer between districts on or before the pupil enrollment count date during the current school year, the USDA does allow for the transfer of lunch eligibility status from one district to another. In such cases, if the receiving district is able to include the student in the Student October Count data submission, the district can report the student's lunch eligibility status from the sending district if it has documentation demonstrating the student's eligibility from the sending district. In the absence of such documentation, the receiving district must obtain new or updated documentation evidencing the student's lunch eligibility.

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## Variance Waiver

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In the event a district is unable to use prior-year carryover documentation to evidence free or reduced-price lunch eligibility because the pupil enrollment count date does not fall within the first 30 days of school, the district may request a variance waiver from CDE to extend the 30-school day requirement (only as it relates to the at-risk count). In the absence of any current-year documentation evidencing a student's lunch eligibility status, this waiver will allow the district to use prior year documentation to evidence a student's lunch eligibility status. This variance waiver only pertains to lunch eligibility status reporting in the Student October data submission and will not impact the Carryover Provision as it relates to the child nutrition program.

All waiver requests submitted for consideration should include an applicable calendar and outline the reason for the waiver and must be addressed to, and received by the Executive Director of School Finance and Grants, [Amy Carman](mailto:carman_a@cde.state.co.us) (carman\_a@cde.state.co.us), no later than September 15.

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## ► Extended Eligibility

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Free lunch eligibility may be extended to students who are not included or listed on the complete direct certification list ("match list") for a given household, but who reside in that household. In such cases, eligibility can only be extended as a result of SNAP/TANF/FDPIR or Medicaid benefits, and not in cases of migrant student status. Students with extended eligibility who are identified on or before the pupil enrollment count date for the current school year may be reported as free lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission if the district notes the following:

- The name of the household member who appears on the complete direct certification list
- The date of the extension
- Basis of extension (same household address, application, or "Extended Eligibility to Additional Household Members" letter)



As allowed by CDE's School Nutrition Unit, this information may be documented in one of the following ways, including (but not limited to):

- In the district's nutrition services system and/or student information system using notes, comments, etc.
- Handwritten on a printed complete direct certification list
- On a separate document that is maintained by the district nutrition services department that contains all applicable information as outlined above
- An "Extended Eligibility to Additional Household Members" letter

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## Best Practices/Data Validation

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### District Stakeholders

Districts are strongly encouraged to include in the data submission and audit process district staff who may be involved in any portion of the at-risk data collection. Specifically, districts should include the pupil count coordinator/data respondent, nutrition services, homeless/migrant/Head Start/foster coordinators, business officials, and information technology staff.

- The pupil count coordinator/data respondent ensures the overall data is included in the final Student October Count data submission.
- Nutrition services ensures the accurate determination of lunch status and that the final counts in the student information system match the counts in the nutrition point-of-sale system.
- The homeless/migrant/Head Start/foster coordinator(s) work with nutrition services to ensure free lunch status for identified students.
- The business official needs to be aware of any changes in the free and reduced-price lunch counts, which directly impact the district's funding.
- Information technology staff ensure the proper data link between the point-of-sale system and the student information system through to Data Pipeline.

### ► CEDAR/COGNOS

Districts are encouraged to verify their free and reduced-price lunch counts prior to finalizing their Student October Count snapshot submission. This should include reviewing the following reports, found in CEDAR/COGNOS:

- District Summary of Pupil Counts
- District Summary of Pupil FTE by County Fragment (if applicable)
- School Summary of Pupil Counts
- Summary of Pupil Counts for Specific Schools

Descriptions of each of these reports can be found in the [CEDAR/COGNOS Report Guide](https://www.cde.state.co.us/datapipeline/studentoctoberreportdefinitions), available at <https://www.cde.state.co.us/datapipeline/studentoctoberreportdefinitions>



## Income Eligibility Guidelines 2023-2024

Household Size	Free Guidelines					Reduced-Price Guidelines				
	Yearly	Monthly	2x/Month	Every Other Week	Weekly	Yearly	Monthly	2x/Month	Every Other Week	Weekly
1	\$18,954	\$1,580	\$790	\$729	\$365	\$26,973	\$2,248	\$1,124	\$1,038	\$519
2	\$25,636	\$2,137	\$1,069	\$986	\$493	\$36,482	\$3,041	\$1,521	\$1,404	\$702
3	\$32,318	\$2,694	\$1,347	\$1,243	\$622	\$45,991	\$3,833	\$1,917	\$1,769	\$885
4	\$39,000	\$3,250	\$1,625	\$1,500	\$750	\$55,500	\$4,625	\$2,313	\$2,135	\$1,068
5	\$45,682	\$3,807	\$1,904	\$1,757	\$879	\$65,009	\$5,418	\$2,709	\$2,501	\$1,251
6	\$52,364	\$4,364	\$2,182	\$2,014	\$1,007	\$74,518	\$6,210	\$3,105	\$2,867	\$1,434
7	\$59,046	\$4,921	\$2,461	\$2,271	\$1,136	\$84,027	\$7,003	\$3,502	\$3,232	\$1,616
8	\$65,728	\$5,478	\$2,739	\$2,528	\$1,264	\$93,536	\$7,795	\$3,898	\$3,598	\$1,799
For each additional family member add	\$6,682	\$557	\$279	\$257	\$129	\$9,509	\$793	\$397	\$366	\$183
Error-Prone Thresholds	\$1,200	\$100	\$50	\$44	\$24	\$1,200	\$100	\$50	\$44	\$24



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## Complete Direct Certification Lists

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Any student who appears on a district complete direct certification list (“match list”), processed on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date for the current school year\*, may be reported as free lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission.

In order to ensure inclusion of all possible free lunch eligible students in the at-risk count and maximize at-risk funding, it is recommended that the district’s nutrition services unit run direct certification uploads monthly after each new file is made available by the School Nutrition Unit. Additionally, the School Auditing Office strongly recommends districts run a direct certification upload on the pupil enrollment count date. (This upload is in addition to any uploads required by CDE’s School Nutrition Unit to support the child nutrition programs.)

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## Funding and Audit Documentation Requirements

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If any student is identified as free lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission as evidenced by a complete direct certification list, the district must retain all applicable documentation until after the completion of the at-risk count audit for the given school year.

Documentation includes, but is not limited to:

- Complete direct certification lists generated on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date for the current school year
- Documentation to support [extended eligibility](#) based on a complete direct certification list (with the accompanying complete direct certification list, if applicable)
- Documentation evidencing Carryover Provision eligibility (as well as the carryover documentation from the prior school year, if applicable)
  - District calendar showing the pupil enrollment count date fell within the first 30 school days for the current school year, OR
  - Letter from CDE stating that the district’s request for a variance waiver to the Carryover Provision was granted

\*At the time of audit, the School Auditing Office will work with districts that submitted the Flexibility of Effective Date for Direct Certification Eligibility Form to the School Nutrition Unit.



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## Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals

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If a student is identified as free or reduced-price lunch eligible through the completion of an Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals, the student may be reported as such in the district's Student October Count data submission. The district must ensure that the application is filled out correctly and completely, and that it is accurately processed by district staff.

During the at-risk count audit, the School Auditing Office will review applications for all applicable students included in the at-risk count sample to ensure, at a minimum, the following:

- Each application is for the applicable school year
- All students (and additional household members, for income eligibility determinations) are included on the application and listed by first and last name
- Household income is stated (if applicable)
- The application is signed by an adult member of the household
- The date the application was received by the district (on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date)

If a school or district is accepting electronic applications, the information above must be personally entered by the signing household member or with the household member present; school or district staff are not permitted to sign applications on behalf of family members. Nutrition systems can typically generate multiple types of report; the appropriate report for many common nutrition systems can be found on the School Auditing Office's [At-Risk Count Documentation Quick Reference](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/at-risk_documentation_quick_reference) ([http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/at-risk\\_documentation\\_quick\\_reference](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/at-risk_documentation_quick_reference)).

In the event an application indicates a student is a foster child the student is automatically eligible for free lunch and no further verification is required. Students who are identified as homeless, migrant, participating in Head Start, or runaway on an application are eligible for free lunch; however, prior to being approved for free school meals, the above statuses must be confirmed by a school district liaison. Additionally, if the application states that the household is receiving SNAP, TANF, or FDPIR (Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations) benefits, and an appropriate case number for any of the above is included, all students listed on the application may be reported as free lunch eligible. (▶ Case numbers for any other programs, including Medicaid, are not acceptable.) In any of these cases, the application must be signed and dated as described above in order to avoid an at-risk count audit exception.

Appropriate Case Number Formats:

- SNAP/TANF: These case numbers are 7 alphanumeric characters that start with "1B"
- FDPIR: This case number is a 9-digit numeric number

[CRS 22-54-112\(4\)\(a\)](#) requires every **participating** site or school to include the federal Application for Free and Reduced-Price Meals (or the state's Family Economic Data Survey form, as appropriate) in its registration materials. The materials shall include an explanation that these documents will be used to determine whether the school is eligible for at-risk funding on behalf of the pupil, and by filling out the form, the parent is ensuring the district or school will receive the at-risk funding to which it is entitled.



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## Funding and Audit Documentation Requirements

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If any student is identified as free or reduced-price lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission as evidenced by an Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals, the district must retain all applicable documentation until after the completion of the at-risk count audit for the given school year.

Documentation includes, but is not limited to:

- Applications for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals received on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date for the current school year
- Documentation evidencing Carryover Provision eligibility (as well as the applicable carryover documentation from the prior school year, if applicable)
  - District calendar showing the pupil enrollment count date fell within the first 30 school days for the current school year, OR
  - Letter from CDE stating that the district's request for a variance waiver to the Carryover Provision was granted

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## Helpful Hints

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- Districts should ensure that total household income is being calculated correctly, especially if there are multiple household incomes that occur at varying frequencies.
- If an application's listed household income is used to determine lunch eligibility status, districts should ensure that all members of the household are listed on the application, and that children listed in both the student and household sections be counted only once in the total household size.
- If information provided on an application is inconsistent or incomplete, districts should develop a process for verifying information submitted on the Application; the district should be prepared to provide documentation demonstrating when changes were made by a district processing official.



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## Family Economic Data Survey (FEDS) Form

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The purpose of the Family Economic Data Survey (FEDS) is to provide an alternative way to collect information needed to determine lunch eligibility status in the event a site is not eligible to distribute the Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals.

If a student is identified as free or reduced-price lunch eligible through the completion of a FEDS form, the student may be reported as such in the district's Student October Count data submission. The district must ensure the form is filled out correctly and completely, as well as accurately processed by the district.

Since the intent of the FEDS form is to mirror the Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals, these forms will be evaluated using the same criteria. As such, during the at-risk count audit, the School Auditing Office will review FEDS forms for all applicable students included in the at-risk count sample to ensure, at a minimum, the following:

- Each form is for the applicable school year
- All students (and additional household members, for income eligibility determinations) are included on the form (first and last name)
- Household income is stated (if applicable)
- Signature of an adult member of the household
- The date the form was received by the district (on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date).

If a school or district is accepting electronic documentation, the information above must be personally entered by the signing household member or with the household member present; school or district staff are not permitted to sign applications on behalf of family members.

In the event a form indicates a student is a foster child the student is automatically eligible for free lunch and no further verification is required. Students who are identified as homeless, migrant, participating in Head Start, or runaway on a form are eligible for free lunch; however, prior to being approved for free school meals, the above statuses must be confirmed by a district or regional liaison. Additionally, if the form states that the household is receiving SNAP, FDPIR, or TANF benefits, and an appropriate case number for any of the above is included, all students listed on the form may be reported as free lunch eligible. (▶ Case numbers for any other programs, including Medicaid, are not acceptable.) In any of these cases, the form must be signed and dated as described above in order to avoid an at-risk count audit exception.

Appropriate Case Number Formats:

- SNAP/TANF: SNAP/TANF: These case numbers are 7 alphanumeric characters that start with "1B"
- FDPIR: This case number is a 9-digit numeric number

[CRS 22-54-112\(4\)\(b\)](#) requires every **non-participating** site or school to include the Family Economic Data Survey form in its registration materials. (Federal law prohibits non-participating schools or sites to distribute Applications for Free and Reduced-Price Meals.) The materials shall include an explanation that these documents will be used to determine whether the school is eligible for at-risk funding on behalf of the pupil, and by filling out the form, the parent is ensuring the district or school will receive the at-risk funding to which it is entitled.





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## Funding and Audit Documentation Requirements

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If any student is identified as free or reduced-price lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission as evidenced by a FEDS form, the district must retain all applicable documentation until after the completion of the at-risk count audit for the given school year.

Documentation includes, but is not limited to:

- FEDS forms completed or received on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date for the current school year
- Documentation evidencing Carryover Provision eligibility (as well as the applicable carryover documentation from the prior school year, if applicable)
  - District calendar showing the pupil enrollment count date fell within the first 30 school days for the current school year, OR
  - Letter from CDE stating that the district's request for a variance waiver to the Carryover Provision was granted

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## Helpful Hints

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- In the event a district accepts online FEDS forms, the documentation provided by the district must include all information included on a paper version of the form. The School Auditing Office has provided [guidance for schools and districts pertaining to the use of electronic signatures](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/school_auditing_online_signatures), which can be found at [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/school\\_auditing\\_online\\_signatures](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/school_auditing_online_signatures)
- The district's food service fund cannot be used for any processing or maintenance of documentation not associated with eligibility for the child nutrition programs, as it is an unallowable cost. This includes collection, processing, and maintenance of the Family Economic Data Survey forms. Other district resources must be used. If the district wishes to have food service personnel process the surveys, the food service fund must be reimbursed for the cost of this processing.
- Districts should ensure that total household income is being calculated correctly, especially if there are multiple household incomes that occur at varying frequencies.
- If a form's listed household income is used to determine lunch eligibility status, districts should ensure that all members of the household are listed on the form, and that children listed in both the student and household sections are counted only once in the total household size.
- If information provided on a form is inconsistent or incomplete, districts should develop a process for verifying information submitted on the FEDS form; the district should be prepared to provide documentation demonstrating when changes were made by a district processing official.



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## Categorical Eligibility Determinations

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Students identified with a categorical designation on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date for the current school year should be reported as free lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission. Such categories include students who are identified as foster children, migrant, homeless or runaway, or a Head Start participant. Documentation provided by the district at the time of audit must show that the student with a categorical designation was identified as such on or before the pupil enrollment count date of the current school year.

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### Foster Children

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A student identified as foster (on an Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals, the FEDS form, or a foster list/letter confirming foster status from a state agency, local agency, or a court), on or before the pupil enrollment count date, should be reported as free lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission.

If CDE identifies the student as a foster child during the Student October Count data submission, the district should report the student as free lunch eligible and retain the CDE Data Pipeline Error Report as evidence of foster child status for serving free breakfast and/or lunch to the student.

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### Migrant Students

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A student identified as migrant (on a complete direct certification list or by a [Regional Migrant Education Program Liaison](#) using guidelines established under Section 107 of the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004) on or before the pupil enrollment count date should be reported as free lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission.

- Only a Regional Migrant Education Program Liaison may include a student on the Migrant List. For audit purposes, school nutrition system status reports are **not** sufficient documentation of Migrant designation.

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### Homeless or Runaway Students

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A student identified as homeless or runaway (by the district's Homeless Liaison, using guidelines established under the McKinney-Vento Act and/or the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act), and included on the district's Homeless or Runaway list on or before the pupil enrollment count date, should be reported as free lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission.

- Only a district's Homeless Liaison may include a student on the Homeless or Runaway List. For audit purposes, school nutrition system status reports are **not** sufficient documentation of Homeless or Runaway designation.

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### Head Start Students

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A student should be reported as free lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission if the student was identified as having been enrolled in any of the following, using eligibility criteria identical to or more stringent than federal Head Start requirements:

- Federally-funded Head Start; or
- Comparable state-funded Head Start or pre-kindergarten program; or
- Indian Tribal Organization-funded Head Start or pre-kindergarten program



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To be reported as free-lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission, students participating in Head Start must have been included on a list from the appropriate school official on or before the pupil enrollment count date.

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## Funding and Audit Documentation Requirements

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If any student is identified as free lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission based on a categorical designation, the district must retain all applicable documentation until after the completion of the at-risk count audit for the given school year.

- Applications for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals and/or FEDS forms completed or received between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date for the current school year
- Foster child, migrant, homeless, runaway, or Head Start student lists dated on or before the pupil enrollment count date
  - Because Categorical Eligibility student lists must be maintained by appropriate district or regional personnel (as applicable), nutrition system reports are not considered sufficient documentation of Migrant, Homeless, or Runaway designation for audit purposes. Therefore, district nutrition and/or categorical eligibility liaisons must retain these lists until after the district's at-risk audit has been completed.
- Documentation evidencing Carryover Provision eligibility (as well as the applicable carryover documentation from the prior school year, if applicable)
  - District calendar showing the pupil enrollment count date fell within the first 30 school days for the current school year OR
  - Letter from CDE stating that the district's request for a variance waiver to the Carryover Provision was granted

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## Helpful Hints

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- In the event there are multiple students listed on an Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals or FEDS form, and only some of them are identified as being categorically eligible (e.g. there is one foster child student in a household where there are five total students), the remaining students are only eligible for free or reduced-price lunch if there is a valid household SNAP/TANF number, or if household income level requirement has been met, and if the Application/FEDS form is completed correctly and dated appropriately.



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## Special Assistance Certification and Reimbursement Alternative

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### Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Provision 2

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For districts that have schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2 programs, the free and reduced-price lunch status for a student reported in the Student October Count data submission may not match the status in the district's point-of-sale system.

While all students attending these schools are eligible to eat meals for free, the district can only report the student as free or reduced-price lunch eligible ***if it has documentation for the student evidencing free or reduced-price lunch eligibility that is dated any time between, and including, the first year of participation through the pupil enrollment count date of the current Student October Count data submission (usually July 1 of year one through October 1 of the current school year), not to exceed CDE-approved provisional timelines.***

Once the student is identified as free or reduced-price lunch eligible during this time frame, the student can continue to be reported as free or reduced-price lunch eligible in each subsequent Student October Count data submission through the final year of the cycle (as long as the student remains enrolled in a school participating in CEP).

For at-risk funding purposes, the district must:

- Collect documentation for all students during the first year of participation; and
- Collect, for students who are not identified as free or reduced-price lunch eligible in year one, documentation in each subsequent year through the CDE-approved provision timelines, or until the student is identified as free or reduced-price lunch eligible

***In the event a CEP or Provision 2 district or school resets its starting year, all new "year one" documentation must be collected.***

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### Funding and Audit Documentation Requirements

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If any student attending a CEP or Provision 2 district/school is identified as free or reduced-price lunch eligible in the Student October Count data submission based on documentation listed below, the district must retain this documentation until after the completion of the at-risk lunch count audit for the given school year.

CEP (year one through the completion of the CDE-approved provisional cycle)

- Complete direct certification Lists
- FEDS form
- Foster Child, Migrant, Homeless, Runaway, Head Start Lists

Provision 2

- Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals (year one only)
- FEDS form (years 2-4 only)
- Complete direct certification Lists
- Foster Child, Migrant, Homeless, Runaway, Head Start Lists



## Helpful Hints

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- If, during the first year of participation, a CEP or Provision 2 student is not identified as eligible for free or reduced-price lunch on or between July 1 and the pupil enrollment count date, the district should continue to monitor these students to determine if they may be eligible to be reported as free or reduced-price lunch eligible in subsequent Student October Count data submissions through the last year of the CDE-approval provisional cycle.
- If students transfer into a participating district or school after the year one Student October Count data submission, the district will need to have documentation evidencing free or reduced-price lunch eligibility for that student in order to submit them as such in subsequent Student October Count data submissions.
- Districts with CEP and Provision 2 schools should ensure that they have a process in place for tracking lunch eligibility status in the Student October Count data submission for students reported at these schools, as this status may differ from the student's actual eligibility status for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs.
- District nutrition service staff should coordinate with the district Pupil Count audit contact or Student October Count data respondent to ensure accurate reporting and collection of required audit documentation.
- CEP and Provision 2 districts and schools are encouraged to communicate with parents the value of completing the FEDS form, which may include information about potential benefits to the school or district, such as additional at-risk funding available to the district, etc.