



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Deborah Gist
Commissioner

To: Superintendents, Principals, Business Managers and Independent School Administrators

From: Becky Bessette

Date: September 8, 2009

RE: Extending Categorical Eligibility to Additional Children in a Household

Please be advised that USDA's policy related to categorical eligibility for free meals or free milk for children who are members of a household receiving assistance under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) or the Family Independence Program (FIP - nationally, this program is known as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Program) has been changed. USDA is modifying the policy to increase access to the child nutrition programs and to streamline the eligibility process.

Beginning in School Year 2009-2010, for direct certification based on SNAP or FIP, and applications where case numbers are provided for these programs, all children in the family are categorically eligible for free meals. A family is defined as "a group of related or nonrelated individuals who are not residents of an institution or boarding house, but are living as one economic unit." To the extent possible, the local educational agency (LEA) must extend eligibility for free meals to all children in what would be considered a family for the purposes of applying for free or reduced price meals or free milk. If the LEA does not have an application as a reference, it may be able to use school district enrollment records to determine additional children who are part of the family who were not identified through direct certification. For households submitting applications with case numbers for some, but not all, of their children, the LEA must certify all children as categorically eligible for free meals or milk. Any income information on the application is disregarded. Further, for purposes of carry-over into the new school year, categorical eligibility must, to the extent feasible, be extended to newly enrolled siblings.

This memorandum supersedes the policy provided in the January 2008 edition of the Eligibility Manual for School Meals concerning categorical eligibility. USDA will be updating the manual. These policies extend to the Child and Adult Care Food Program and to the Summer Food

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Service Program when applications are taken. Please note that these policies do not extend to other categorically eligible categories such as Head Start or children enrolled in the Migrant Education Program. If you have any questions, please contact Stephen Carey via phone at 222-8936 or via email at stephen.carey@ride.ri.gov