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Free School Meals to Continue in Upcoming School Year

Harrisburg, Pa. – Pennsylvania K-12 schools will have the option to continue offering free nutritious school meals during the 2021-22 school year, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) announced today. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food & Nutrition Services (FNS) released a group of waivers and eligibility guidelines allowing schools to offer the meals without determining eligibility based on the student’s household income.

“I’m grateful to the USDA for their commitment to combatting hunger throughout this pandemic,” said Secretary of Education Noe Ortega. “I encourage schools to take advantage of these waivers, which help ensure learners across Pennsylvania continue to have access to free, nutritious meals.”

Participating schools will operate under the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and will receive a higher federal reimbursement rate per meal.

Schools that elect not to serve free meals through the SSO will determine eligibility for free and reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) using federal income guidelines. The annually [updated income eligibility guidelines for the 2021-22 school year](#) have been released by the USDA.

The new eligibility guidelines went into effect July 1, 2021 and allows schools and other institutions and facilities to determine eligibility for the NSLP, the School Breakfast Program, the Special Milk Program for Children, the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the Summer Food Service Program, and the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer.

To apply, households already receiving benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) need only include the SNAP or TANF case number on their application if not notified of their automatic eligibility by the school. Households enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) may qualify for free or reduced-price school meals and should complete a Household Meal Benefit Application. Other households can find more information on Pennsylvania’s [COMPASS website](#).

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights

1400 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

(2) *Fax: (202) 690-7442; or*

(3) *E-mail: program.intake@usda.gov.*

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