

Meal Eligibility of Homeless Children

Nutrition Services Division Management Bulletin	
To: School Nutrition Program Sponsors	Number: 02-114
Attention: Food Service Director	Date: June 2002
Subject: Updated Guidance for Documenting the Free and Reduced Price Meal Eligibility of Homeless Children	
Reference: United States Department of Agriculture SP Policy Memo 02-15 and APB SPS 92-42, and Child Nutrition and Food Distribution Management Advisory 92-106	

This Management Bulletin (MB) updates the guidance for determining the free and reduced-price meal eligibility of homeless children participating in school nutrition programs.

In May 1992, we provided initial guidance issued by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding homeless children. This MB provides further guidance that is prompted by a January 2002 amendment to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The amendment expands the definition of homelessness and requires a school district to designate a liaison for homeless children.

Homelessness is defined as the absence of a fixed, regular, or adequate nighttime residence. This includes sharing housing with others due to a loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons. Families or individuals who live in temporary housing including but not limited to hotels, motels, camps, shelters, parks, abandoned buildings, or cars are defined as homeless. Migrant children who live in any of the above circumstances and children who temporarily reside with another family or household may also be considered homeless.

The amendment requires each school district to designate a liaison for homeless children. The liaison is to act as an advocate for homeless children, ensuring that they receive all eligible services, including the benefits of school nutrition programs.

To expedite the free and reduced-price meal eligibility process for homeless children, school officials may accept documentation that children are homeless from district liaisons or directors of homeless shelters. The documentation may be used in lieu of a regular application for free or reduced-price meals, and must include the child's or children's names, effective dates, and the signature of the liaison or shelter director.

In the case of a child who temporarily resides with another family or household, school officials shall not use the household size and income of the host family when determining the free or reduced-price meal eligibility for the homeless child. However, if a host family applies for free or reduced-price meals, the host family may include the homeless family as household members, if the host family provides financial support. If the host family meets the free or reduced-price meal eligibility criteria, school officials should provide temporary approval; this eligibility must be reevaluated when the homeless family no longer resides with the host family.

Questions: School Nutrition Programs Unit | 800-952-5609

Last Reviewed: Wednesday, October 22, 2014