

School Nutrition Programs:

Free & Reduced-Price Verification Instructions SY 25-26

Verification is the process by which schools confirm the eligibility of a sample of approved free and reduced-price meal applications. **Schools will report the verification results and October eligibility data on the School Food Authority (SFA) Verification Collection Report in MAPS.** Please carefully read through these instructions to ensure reporting accuracy. Additional instructions can be found in the [USDA's Eligibility Manual](#). Ensure DCA direct certification eligibilities have been updated prior to starting the verification process.

All sponsors, regardless of participation type, must submit the Verification Report in MAPS by Nov 30th. District's operating CEP district-wide may not have any applications to verify but must submit the verification report in MAPS with the following items completed: 1-1 and check the boxes for items 5-1 and 5-6.

Important Verification Dates:

October 1	(1) Record Oct 1 st Application Counts (2) Calculate Sample Size (3) Send Household Notification Letters
October 31	Record Student Counts as of October 31 (section 4 column B).
November 15	Deadline to collect household documentation/complete verification process with households.
November 30	Submit Verification Report in MAPS starting Nov 1. Report Deadline November 30.

October 1 (1) Record Application Counts (2) Calculate Sample Size (3) Send Household Notification Letters

Section 4 A – Number of approved free and reduced *Applications* on file as of October 1st

- Applications in the pool of those subject to being drawn for the verification process.

Student counts (column B) are to be captured as of October 31.

4-1 A: Categorically Free Eligible – Record the number of categorically free applications (SNAP, TANF, FDPIR, or Foster Care) only if NOT Directly Certified from DCA. *Do not duplicate counts.* Report applications confirmed as directly certified in Section 3 only as proof of their eligibility has already been confirmed and therefore are not subject to verification process. Free Direct Certs supersedes an application, and SNAP-DC supersedes all. **Item 4-1 counts should be few to none since the majority should be DC and listed in Sect 3.**

4-2 A: Report the number of **Free Income based Applications**

4-3 A: Report the number of **Reduced-Price Applications**

Method of Verification Process -

Is dependent upon on the percent of household applications that responded to last year's verification process.

- If *at least* 80% of the households verified responded to last year's verification process, your district may conduct either:
 - **Random (Alternate One) verification method,** (or)
 - randomly draw the 3% verification sample from applications subject to verification (not directly certified).
 - **Focused (Alternate Two) verification method**
 - Draw the 1% verification sample from Error-Prone Applications, plus
 - Draw the .5% verification sample from Categorical Eligible Applications (eligible prog/case# but not direct cert).
- If *less than* 80% of the households verified responded to last year's verification process, your district must conduct:
 - **Error-Prone (Standard) verification method**
 - Draw the 3% verification sample from Error-Prone Applications.
 - Unsure? See the [list of sponsors that must complete the Error-Prone Verification Method during SY 25-26](#).

Error-Prone Applications – within \$100 per month (\$1,200 annually) of the Income Eligibility Guidelines.

If conducting the Error-Prone or Focused verification methods, it is recommended to indicate Error-Prone Applications upon originally determining free or reduced eligibility statuses.

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Verification Sample Methods		
Do not include applications already confirmed as directly certified in the total count of applications that are in the pool of those subject to verification as their eligibility has already been confirmed from the program source.		
Error-Prone (Standard)	Error-Prone (Standard) method required if less than 80% of the household apps responded to last year's verification process.	3% of all applications approved as of Oct 1, selected from error prone applications.
Random (Alternate One)	May conduct the Random (Alternate One) method if 80% or more of the household apps responded to last year's verification process.	3% of all applications approved as of Oct 1, selected at random.
Focused (Alternate Two)	May conduct the Focused (Alternate Two) method if 80% or more of the household apps responded to last year's verification process.	1% of all applications approved as of Oct 1, selected from error-prone applications. PLUS .5% of applications approved as of Oct 1, selected from categorically eligible applications (household provided case # or categorical program on app) but NOT directly certified in DCA.

Example 3% Sample Size – Calculate the Number of Applications to Verify

- Random/Alternate-One (or) Error-Prone/Standard Verification Methods

Applications listed in section 4 are subject to verification because proof of eligibility has NOT been established (not in DCA).

- Total number of **applications** in section 4, column A.
 - This is the number of applications in the pool subject to the verification process.
- Multiply the total number of applications in section 4 by .03 (3%).
 - **Round all decimals up to the next whole number.**
 - This calculation equals the number of applications you will need to verify.
 - Random/Alternate-One – randomly draw the required number of applications using any random method.
 - Error-Prone/Standard – randomly draw the required number of applications from those considered error-prone.
 - If there are not enough error-prone applications on file to meet the required number of applications to verify, after exhausting all error-prone applications, sponsors may randomly pull from other applications on file that are subject to verification process.

3% Calculation - Example

Approved Applications
as of Oct 1st

Section 4	Students approved as FREE or REDUCED PRICE eligible through a household application	**ALL SFAs collecting applications must report Section 4**	A. Number of Applications
		4-1: Approved as categorically FREE Eligible: Based on those providing documentation (e.g. a case number for SNAP, TANF, FDPIR on an application)	1
		4-2: Approved as FREE eligible: Based on household size and income information	24
		4-3: Approved as REDUCED PRICE eligible: Based on household size and income information	17

Total number of Applications in section 4 (Column A) multiplied by 3% =

In this example 2 applications should be randomly selected for the verification process

$$\begin{array}{rcl}
 & 42 & \\
 \times & 00.03 \text{ (3\%)} & \\
 \hline
 = & 1.26 = 2 & \text{(round all decimals up)}
 \end{array}$$

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Send Household Verification Letters

Recommend attaching the [Verification Application Tracker](#) sheet to verified applications to ensure requirements are met.

- Before sending verification letters, a Confirmation Review must be conducted to ensure accuracy of the initial determination.
 - Must be a person other than the official who made the initial eligibility determination
 - Document the confirmation review by signing the “confirming signature” line of the selected application
- Send the [“We Must Check Your Application”](#) letter to selected household(s)
 - Households have 10 days to reply
 - If no reply, follow-up contact at least 1 time and document follow-up attempts (phone call, email, text, etc.)
 - Districts with low response rates (less than 80%) will be subject to error-prone method next year
- Send the prototype [“We Have Checked Your Application”](#) letter to households
 - If verification results in higher benefits (e.g., changing from reduced-price to free category), the change is effective immediately and must be implemented no later than 3 operating days later
 - If verification results in reduced or terminated meal benefits, households must be given 10 calendar days’ written advance notice of the change (continue benefits for 10 calendar days)
- **November 15th – Federal deadline to gather/confirm household’s proof of eligibility responses and send final household correspondence for the verification process**
- Document household responses/nonresponses in section 5-8 on the [verification form](#)

October 31 Record Student Counts

Report the number of approved **students** as of October 31st for each category (Sections 1 – 4 Column B) and record counts on the [Verification form](#). An updated direct certification report should be reviewed on or just prior to October 31.

Section 1: School Sites/ Student Counts

1-1: Enrolled Student Counts – Enter the number of (A.) OPI School Sites and (B.) Total enrolled students as of Oct 31.

1-2: Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCIs) must enter the number of sites and students enrolled for each type.

Section 1 - Total Schools, Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCIs), and Enrolled Students		
All SFAs must report Section 1. Report schools or institutions operating the NSLP and/or SBP as of the last operating day in October .		
	A. Number of Schools OR Institutions	B. Number of Students
1-1 Total schools (Do not include RCCIs):	3	0
1-2 Total RCCIs (Do not include schools counted in 1-1):	0	0
1-2a RCCIs with day students (Report ONLY day students in 1-2aB):	0	0
1-2b RCCIs with NO day students:	0	0

Section 2: This section is applicable to CEP sites only

2-3: CEP Sites – Enter the number of (A.) Schools and (B.) Students participating in CEP

- If ALL school sites are, CEP or RCCI check items 3-1 & 5-1, and you are finished.
- If only SOME of the district’s sites participate in CEP, report item 2-3 to include the total count of CEP schools/student data and then complete the remaining sections (3 through 5, which includes the direct cert counts) for the remaining schools NOT participating in CEP.

Section 2 - SFAs with schools operating alternate provisions		
Only SFAs with alternative provisions must report Section 2. Report schools or institutions operating the NSLP and/or SBP as of the last operating day in October .		
	A. Number of Schools AND Institutions	B. Number of Students
2-1 Operating Provision 2/3 in a BASE year for NSLP and SBP:	0	0
2-2 Operating Provision 2/3 in a NON BASE year for NSLP and SBP:	0	0
2-2a Provision 2/3 students reported as FREE in a NON BASE year:		0
2-2b Provision 2/3 students reported as REDUCED PRICE in a NON BASE year:		0
2-3 Operating the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP):	0	0

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Section 3-B: Student Counts - Directly Certified as of Oct 31

Students in Section 3 are NOT subject to verification because proof of eligibility has already been confirmed. Do not duplicate counts.

3-1: Leave 3-1 blank (unless *all* school sites are CEP or RCCI)

3-2 B: Students SNAP Directly Certified in DCA (SNAP Direct Cert eligibility supersedes all other eligible categories)

When a student is Free Directly Certified through DCA that eligibility supersedes all other information on file (such as household application or letter from the SNAP agency) and the student should be counted as directly certified. If a student is directly certified with SNAP and another program (e.g. Foster Care or Medicaid), SNAP supersedes all other program eligibility sources. Do not include CEP school SNAP DC counts with item 3-2 (regular pricing prog school sites only).

Items 3-2 & 3-3 auto-populates Oct 31st direct cert counts from DCA to the MAPS verification report. Please review for accuracy.

3-3 B: Students Directly Certified by other source categories: TANF, FDPIR, homeless, migrant, runaway & foster care and Medicaid-Free (proof of participant eligibility confirmed by source or through DCA system). *This item also auto-populates data counts from DCA.*

3-4 B: Categorically Free Students by household submission of SNAP letter only. SNAP Letters that were also validated in the DCA system as directly certified should be counted in 3-2 B as SNAP directly cert only (do not count in both places).

Medicaid-Reduced is currently not being collected on the USDA's Verification Reporting form.

Section 3	Students approved as FREE eligible NOT subject to verification	**ALL SFAs must report Section 3 or check box 3-1 if applicable**	B. Number of FREE Students
		3-1: <input type="checkbox"/> Check the box only if all schools and/or RCCIs in the SFA were not required to perform direct certification with SNAP (i.e. NON BASE year Provision 2/3 for all schools)	
		3-2: Students directly certified through Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): Do <u>not</u> include students certified with SNAP through the letter method.	
		3-3: Students directly certified through other programs: Include those directly certified through Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or Medicaid (if applicable); those documented as homeless, migrant, runaway, foster, Head Start, Pre-K Even Start, or non-applicant but approved by local officials. DO NOT include SNAP students already reported in 3-2.	
		3-4: Students certified categorically FREE eligible through SNAP letter method: Include students certified for free meals through the family providing a letter from the SNAP agency.	
			97
			11
			0

Section 4-B: Student Counts – Categorical/Income Free & Reduced as of Oct 31

4-1 B: Categorically Free Students - Application listing a Case Number *only* (SNAP, TANF, FDPIR or Foster Care)

Report the number of Categorically Free Students that have NOT been confirmed as Directly Certified in DCA and therefore are subject to the verification process because proof of eligibility has not been confirmed.

Categorically Free Students that have been confirmed in DCA are considered Directly Certified and should be recorded in section 3.

4-2 B: Report the number of **Free Income based Students**

4-3 B: Report the number of **Reduced-Price Students**

Section 4	Students approved as FREE or REDUCED PRICE eligible through a household application	**ALL SFAs collecting applications must report Section 4**	A. Number of Applications	B. Number of Students
		4-1: Approved as categorically FREE Eligible: Based on those providing documentation (e.g. a case number for SNAP, TANF, FDPIR on an application)	1	3
		4-2: Approved as FREE eligible: Based on household size and income information	24	35
		4-3: Approved as REDUCED PRICE eligible: Based on household size and income information	17	30

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Section 5 – Verification Process & Results

5-1: Only check the box if **all** school sites are exempt from the verification process. Types of sponsors exempt to the Verification process include CEP (operated at all sites), Residential Child Care Institutions and Milk only.

5-2: Household documentation and correspondence must be completed by November 15th.

If you are unable to complete the verification process by November 15, the district must submit a written request to this deadline. Extensions may be approved up to Dec 15. See the Verification [Deadline Extension Request Form](#) online.

5-3: For further information, see pages 1-2 for the **Method of Verification** details, or reference the [USDA's Eligibility Manual](#).

- Most sponsors qualify for the Alternate One (Random) verification method.

5-4: Only report the number of Error-Prone Applications **if during last year's verification process**, less than 80% of the households responded and your district is required to conduct the Alternate One/Error-Prone method.

5-5: Report the number of Applications Verified:

- For most sponsors, this number should reflect the calculation on page 2
 - Total of Section 4 Column A multiplied by 3% - round all decimals up
- This number should also equal the total number of verified applications in Section 5-8

<p align="center">**ALL SFAs must report Section 5 or check box 5-1 if applicable**</p> <p>5-1: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Check the box if ALL schools and/or RCCIs are exempt from verification (see instructions for list of exemptions). If 5-1 is checked, no further reporting in Section 5 is required.</p>			
<p>5-2: Was verification performed and completed?</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, completed by November 15th</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, completed after November 15th</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, verification was NOT performed or the process was not completed.</p>		<p>5-3: Type of Verification process used:</p> <p>1. <input type="checkbox"/> Standard (Lesser of 3% or 3,000 error-prone)</p> <p>2. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alternate one (Lesser of 3% or 3,000 selected randomly)</p> <p>3. <input type="checkbox"/> Alternate two (Lesser of 1% or 1,000 error prone applications PLUS lesser of one-half of one percent or 500 applications with SNAP/TANF/FDPIR case numbers)</p>	
<p>If 1 or 3 is checked in 5-3, report 5-4.</p> <p>If 2 is checked in 5-3, enter</p>	<p>5-4: Total ERROR PRONE applications: Report all applications as of October 1st considered error prone</p>	<p>5-5: Number of applications selected for verification sample:</p>	2

5-6: Direct Verification – Using records from public agencies to verify proof of income and/or program participation from the application(s) *selected for the verification process*, if none were validated as directly certified in DCA or confirmed with agency records, check the box.

5-7: Confirmed through Direct Verification - Only report counts in this section if applications randomly selected for the verification process were directly verified/confirmed with agency records (validated in DCA).

<p align="center">**ALL SFAs must report 5-7 or check box 5-6 if applicable**</p> <p>5-6: <input type="checkbox"/> Check the box if direct verification was not conducted in the SFA, (i.e. not one of the schools and/or RCCIs in the SFA performed direct verification). If 5-6 is checked, skip 5-7.</p>		A. Number of Applications	B. Number of Students
Report if FREE and/or REDUCED PRICE eligibility is confirmed through	5-7: Confirmed through		

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Nov 30 Submit Verification Report in MAPS System

Submit the SFA Verification Collection Report online through [MAPS](#). The electronic Verification Report will be available in MAPS November 1st-30th. Paper Versions Will Not Be Accepted. The [PDF/paper version of the form](#) is available as a worksheet only.

Locate the Verification Report in MAPS:

1. Select the 'Application' menu

2. Then click on the 'Verification Report'

The screenshot shows the 'School Nutrition Programs' header with the 'MONTANA Agreement and Payment System' logo. A navigation bar includes 'Applications', 'Claims', 'Compliance', 'Reports', 'My Training', and 'Search'. The 'Applications' menu is highlighted with a red circle. Below the navigation bar, a table lists various items. The 'Verification Report' item is circled in red.

Item	Description
Application Packet	Applications Forms (Sponsor and Site)
Verification Report	Mandatory Annual Verification Report
Food Safety Inspections	Number of Food Safety Inspections by Site
FFVP Grants	Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Grants
FFVP Grant Overview	Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program Grant Information by Site Overview
Financial Report	School Food Annual Revenues and Expenditures Report
Site Enrollment	Site Student Enrollment and Free/Reduced Eligibility from October Claim
Community Eligibility Provision	Enrollment and Eligibility for Community Eligibility Provision
Download Forms	Forms Available for Downloading
Document Library	Library containing downloadable documents and urls

3. Click **Modify** Next to SY 25-26

The screenshot shows the 'Verification Report' page. It displays school information for 'Happy Trails K-12 Schools'. Below the information, a table lists actions for different school years. The 'Modify' button for the 2021-2022 school year is circled in red.

8801 Status: Active
Happy Trails K-12 Schools
DBA: Peaceful County Treasurer
555 406th Street
Happy Valley, MT 59999
Type of Agency: Educational Institution
Type of SNP Organization: Public

Action	School Year	Received Date	Status
Modify	2021 - 2022		Not Started
View	2020 - 2021	02/26/2021	Submitted
View	2019 - 2020	03/25/2020	Submitted
View	2018 - 2019	11/13/2018	Submitted
View	2017 - 2018	11/06/2017	Submitted

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4. Fill out all applicable fields
 - Unfortunately updates to the contact info section cannot currently be made. Please disregard that section for the time being.
5. Click **Save** at the bottom of the form when done.

The screenshot shows the 'SFA Verification Collection Report' for School Year 2021-2022. The form is titled 'SFA Verification Collection Report For School Year: 2021 - 2022'. It includes a header for 'MONTANA Agreement and Payment System' with navigation links for Applications, Claims, Compliance, Reports, My Training, Search, Programs, Year, Help, and Log Out. The form is divided into sections: 'General Information' and 'Verification Contact Information'. The 'General Information' section shows the school's status as 'Active', name as 'Happy Trails K-12 Schools', and address as '555 406th Street, Happy Valley, MT 59999'. The 'Verification Contact Information' section includes fields for Name (Salutation: Mrs., First Name: Jane, Last Name: Doe), Email Address (doej@happytrails.k12.mt.us), Phone (406) 555-5555, and Title (Administrative Assistant). A 'Due Date: November 30, 2021' is displayed. At the bottom, there are 'Save' and 'Cancel' buttons, and a 'VIEW | MODIFY' link.

MAPS Online Verification Form Features

The system pre-fills some of the items for you such as the number of directly certified students will auto-populate a count referenced from the [DCA system](#). Edit checks have been built into the form to correct data entry errors.

Contact Alie Wolf at aliew@mt.gov or (406) 459-5394 with any further verification questions.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.