

# School Nutrition Programs:

## Free & Reduced-Price Verification Instructions SY23-24

Verification is the process by which schools confirm the eligibility of a sample (3%) 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** (under the 'Application' menu). Please carefully read through these instructions to ensure reporting accuracy. Additional instructions can be found in the [USDA's Eligibility Manual](#).

### Important Verification Dates:

- October 1** (1) Record Oct 1<sup>st</sup> 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 the verification process.
- 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 Column A - Record Categories of Approved Applications on File as of October 1st to Determine the Pool of Applications Subject to Verification.

**4-1 Tip: Categorically Free Eligible** – Record the number of Categorically Free Applications (Household Application listed SNAP, TANF, FDPIR or Foster Care program) that are NOT Directly Certified in DCA and therefore are included in the pool of applications subject to verification. Applications confirmed as directly certified must only be counted in Section 3 as proof of their eligibility has already been confirmed and therefore are not subject to verification. Do not duplicate counts. Direct Certification supersedes a paper application and SNAP-direct certs are given top preference.

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

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

- Total the 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 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.

#### 3% Calculation - Example

		<i>Approved Applications as of Oct 1st</i>
<b>Section 4</b>	Students approved as FREE or REDUCED PRICE eligible through a household application	<b>A. Number of Applications</b>
	<b>**ALL SFAs collecting applications must report Section 4**</b>	
	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% =

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

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

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## Method of Verification

**Tip: District's Verification Method displayed in SY23-24 MAPS Sponsor Application - Item #33**

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

**If during last year's verification process:**

- **80% or more of the household's responded**, your district may conduct the Random **Alternate One/Random** method and randomly select 3% of the approved applications on file to verify. This method is most commonly used.
- **Less than 80% of the household's responded**, your district is required to conduct the **Error Prone/Standard** method and select 3% of applications to verify from those considered "error-prone".
  - Error-Prone Applications – Applications within \$100 per month of the Income Eligibility Guideline cut off points.

**Draw the 3% verification sample from applications subject to verification (section 4)**

## Send Verification Letters

- 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 the "confirming signature" line of the selected application

- Send the "We Must Check Your Application" letter to selected household(s)

*Tip: Use the Verification Activity Tracker Worksheet to document the verification process for applications being verified.*

- **Nov 15 - Deadline to gather/confirm household's proof of eligibility responses**
  - Households have 10 days to reply
  - If no reply, follow-up contact at least 1 time and document
    - Districts with low response rates will be subject to error-prone method the following 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)
- 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 31<sup>st</sup> 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<sup>st</sup>.

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

**1-2: For Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCIs) only:** must enter the number of sites and students enrolled for each type then check items 3-1, 5-1 and save changes to submit the report.

## Section 2: This section is applicable to CEP schools only

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

If ALL school sites are CEP, check items 3-1 & 5-1 and you are finished.

If only SOME of the school district's sites participate in CEP, report as follows:

- Section 3-2: Report SNAP-only direct certification data for the schools NOT participating in CEP/Provision 2
- Report remaining fields and all other applicable Sections for schools NOT participating in CEP/Provision 2

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## Section 3-B: Free 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. Students must only be counted as being in one category/section.

**Medicaid-Reduced** student counts are not currently a required data element on the federal verification reporting form. OPI will report Montana's statewide Medicaid-Reduced count to the USDA on behalf of sponsors.

**3-1:** Leave 3-1 blank (unless *all* school sites are CEP/Provision 2 or RCCI)

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

When a student is 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), SNAP should be given preference.

Item 3-2 will auto-populate Oct 31 DCA direct cert counts to sponsor's MAPS verification report. Please review and override count if needed.

**3-3 B: Students Directly Certified through Other Programs:** TANF, FDPIR, Medicaid-Free, Homeless, Migrant, Runaway & Foster Care (eligibility confirmed through DCA or program source).

Item 3-3 will auto-populate Oct 31 DCA direct cert counts to MAPS verification report. Please review for accuracy.

**3-4 B: Categorically Free Students by Household Submission of SNAP Letter Only.** SNAP agency letters that have been validated in DCA system as direct cert should be counted in 3-2 B (do not count in both places).

		<b>**ALL SFAs must report Section 3 or check box 3-1 if applicable**</b>	<b>B. Number of FREE Students</b>
<b>Section 3</b>	Students approved as FREE eligible NOT subject to verification	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 not include students certified with SNAP through the letter method.	97
		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.	11
		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.	0

## Section 4-B: Free & Reduced Student Counts Approved by Application as of Oct 31

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

Students reported as Categorically Free have NOT been confirmed as Directly Certified in DCA and are subject to the verification process because proof of eligibility has not been confirmed by source records.

**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

		<b>**ALL SFAs collecting applications must report Section 4**</b>	<b>A. Number of Applications</b>	<b>B. Number of Students</b>
<b>Section 4</b>	Students approved as FREE or REDUCED PRICE eligible through a household application	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. Sponsors exempt to the Verification process include those with all sites operating CEP, Residential Child Care Institutions or Milk only.

**5-2: Household documentation and correspondence must be completed by November 15<sup>th</sup>.**

Sponsors unable to complete the verification process by November 15 must submit a written request to this deadline. See the Verification Deadline Extension Request form online.

**5-3: Method of Verification** - refer to page 2 for details. The Alternate One (random) method is most common.

**5-4:** Only report the number of Error-Prone Applications on **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

- This number should reflect the calculation on page 1
  - Total Applications in Section 4 Column A multiplied by 3% - round all decimals up
- This number should also equal the total number of applications verified in Sections 5-7 and 5-8.

<b>**ALL SFAs must report Section 5 or check box 5-1 if applicable**</b> <b>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.</b>				
<b>5-2: Was verification performed and completed?</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, completed by November 15th <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, completed after November 15th <input type="checkbox"/> No, verification was NOT performed or the process was not completed.		<b>5-3: Type of Verification process used:</b> 1. <input type="checkbox"/> Standard (Lesser of 3% or 3,000 error-prone) 2. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Alternate one (Lesser of 3% or 3,000 selected randomly) 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)		
If 1 or 3 is checked in 5-3, report 5-4. If 2 is checked in 5-3, enter	<b>5-4: Total ERROR PRONE applications:</b> <i>Report all applications as of October 1st considered error prone</i>		<b>5-5: Number of applications selected for verification sample:</b>	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 the *applications selected for the verification process* were directly verified/confirmed with agency records (in DCA).

<b>**ALL SFAs must report 5-7 or check box 5-6 if applicable**</b> <b>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.</b>		<b>A. Number of Applications</b>	<b>B. Number of Students</b>
Report if FREE and/or REDUCED PRICE eligibility is confirmed through	<b>5-7: Confirmed through</b>		

# School Nutrition Programs: Free & Reduced-Price Verification Instructions

## Nov 30 Submit Verification Report in MAPS System

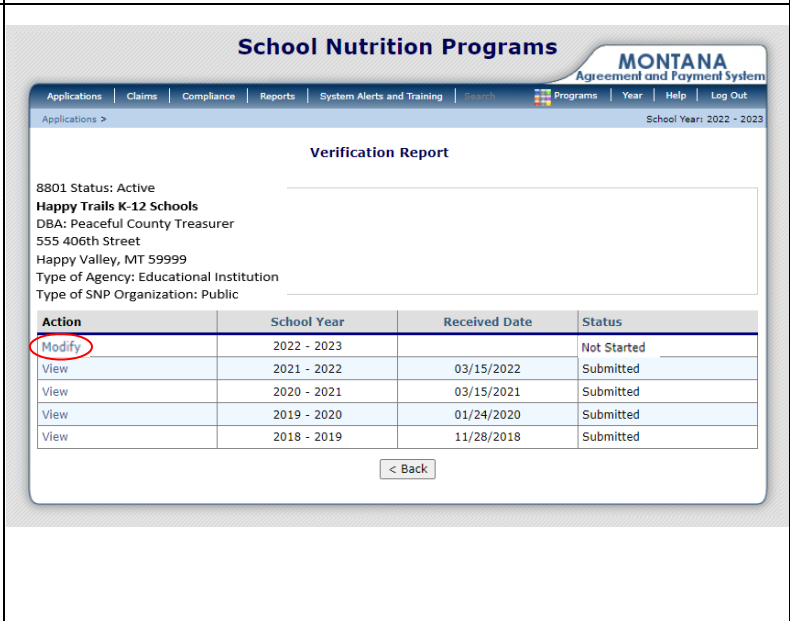
Submit the SFA Verification Collection Report online through [MAPS](#). The electronic Verification Report will be available in MAPS November 1st-30th. Paper Versions Will Not Be Accepted. The [PDF/paper version of the form](#) is available as a worksheet only.

### Locate the Verification Report in MAPS:

1. Select the 'Application' menu
2. Then click on the 'Verification Report'



3. Click **Modify** Next to SY 2023-2024



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4. Fill out all applicable fields
5. Click **Save** at the bottom of the form when done.

The screenshot shows a web application interface for "School Nutrition Programs" under the "MONTANA Agreement and Payment System". The navigation bar includes "Applications", "Claims", "Compliance", "Reports", "My Training", and "Search". The breadcrumb trail is "Applications > Verification Report >". The page title is "SFA Verification Collection Report For School Year: 2022 - 2023".

Below the title, there is a text box containing the following information:  
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

The form is divided into sections:  
**General Information**  
Type of Organization: Public

**Verification Contact Information**

1. Name: Salutation (Mrs.), First Name (Jane), Last Name (Doe)  
2. Email Address: (doej@happytrails.k12.mt.us)  
3. Phone: (406) 555-5555, Ext: ( ), Fax: (406) 555-5555  
4. Title: Administrative Assistant

**Due Date: November 30, 2022**

**Instructions**

At the bottom of the form, 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 auto-populates a count from the [DCA system](#). Edit checks have been incorporated into the MAPS Verification Report form to prompt correction of errors.

Contact Alie Wolf at [aliew@mt.gov](mailto:aliew@mt.gov) or (406) 459-5394 for any questions.

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