



Schools Starting – Important information for Parents & Caregivers about Free School Meals

Children are automatically eligible for FREE school meals if they receive one of the following benefits **OR** the child lives with a sibling or other child who receives these benefits:

- MassHealth (or Medicaid) and the child's income* is less than 133% of the federal poverty level
- TAFDC (cash assistance) benefits,
- SNAP (food stamp) benefits,
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or federal Adoption Assistance (with Medicaid).

Children who meet any of the above should be **automatically approved** (“direct certification”) for free school meals. The parent or other caregiver does not need to file a paper application for free school meals. Foster care, homeless and migrant children are also automatically free meal eligible.

If you are low income but do not meet the rules for “direct certification” for free meals – be sure to fill out an application for free or reduced price meals. Your local school should provide you with a form to complete. And if your child received free or reduced price meals last year, the school should give you free or reduced price meals for the first 30 days of this school year.

If the child you are raising is NOT getting free meals and you think the school made a mistake, you can:

1. Speak immediately with the school nutrition director or principal. Ask them to check the data again to confirm your child gets Medicaid, SNAP or TAFDC and approve free meal status if eligible.
2. Request a fair hearing if your application for free or reduced price meals is denied.
3. Contact your local Legal Services office or MLRI for legal advice.



*A caregiver's income does NOT count for MassHealth unless you are the parent or have legally adopted the child. Only the income of the biological or adoptive parents who live with the minor child counts for MassHealth or TAFDC benefits. For SNAP benefits, the income of all members of a household living together and sharing a majority of the food counts, even if the child is not adopted.