



**North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
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Michael F. Easley, Governor

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April 5, 2002

CACFP 02-20

MEMORANDUM

TO Institutions Participating in Child and Adult Food Care Program

FROM Arnette Cowan, MS, RD, LDN
 Head, Special Nutrition Program

SUBJECT **Categorical Eligibility of Pre-Kindergarten Even Start Participants for Free Meal Benefits (Operational Guidance for Categorical Eligibility)** 26

Categorical Eligibility

To apply for free meal benefits under the Child Nutrition Programs, most households must submit a completed application indicating the household size and income. The official designated to approve applications compares the information submitted by the household to the Income Eligibility Guidelines issued annually to determine their eligibility for free and reduced price benefits. However, certain participating children are eligible for free meals based on their participation in other Federal programs (i.e., categorical or automatic eligibility) such as the Even Start Family Literacy Program.

Criteria for Even Start Categorical Eligibility

For a child to be categorically eligible for free meals based on their participation in Even Start, three criteria must be met the:

- (1) school or institution providing the child with Even Start services must be participating in CACFP, NSLP, SBP, SMP or SFSP.
 - (2) child must be enrolled as a participant in a federally-funded Even Start Family Literacy Program.
 - (3) child must be at the pre-kindergarten level. Once a child has entered kindergarten, the child loses his or her categorical eligibility for free meals based on Even Start.
- Also, categorical eligibility does not apply to other family members.



April 5, 2002

Page 2

226.23-16

Documentation Required for Categorical Eligibility

Required documentation To establish categorical eligibility for free meals in the CACFP, NSLP, SBP, and SFSP or for free milk in the SBP, documentation of a child's participation in a federally-funded Even Start program and documentation that the child is at the pre-kindergarten level must be provided by an Even Start official.

Documentation of a child's Even Start participation can include:

- an approved Even Start application for the child's family, or,
- a statement of enrollment in Even Start, or,
- a list of children participating in Even Start

Confirmation that the child has not yet entered kindergarten must be included in the documentation from the Even Start official.

Re-certification of Categorical Eligibility Beginning of each year, the official responsible for determining eligibility for free and reduced price meals in the CACFP, NSLP, SBP, and SFSP, or for free milk in the SMP must re-establish categorical eligibility for each Even Start child.

Record Retention The documentation of a child's Even Start participation, including confirmation that the child has not yet entered kindergarten, must be maintained on file in accordance with the regulations governing the Child Nutrition Programs. These records must be readily available for review by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the State agency and other appropriate agencies.

Categorical Eligibility Ends

When a child is no longer categorically eligible for free meals under the criteria set forth in this memorandum, the child's family must be provided with an opportunity to apply for free and reduced price meals under standard free and reduced price application procedures or to obtain free meal benefits through direct certification. The school or institution is responsible for providing the family with instructions on how to apply for these benefits.

If you have questions, please contact your regional consultant.

AD/ERB/clg

cc: SNP Staff
Auditors