OSPI School Meal Programs Reference Guide

Processing Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit (CNEEB) Applications

All Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are required to distribute and process Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit (CNEEB) Applications to determine eligibility for free or reduced-price meals, Summer-EBT, reduced fees for local programs, and to secure additional funding for the LEA.

Components of a Complete CNEEB Application

All required components of the CNEEB application must be complete for the household to be approved for benefits.

Income Applications

- The following must be reported on an application to determine benefits based on household size and income:
  - ☐ Names of all household members
  - ☐ Amount, source, and frequency of current income for each household member
    - Any income field left blank should be viewed as zero income. If all income fields are blank, the application should be processed with zero income and approved for benefits.
  - ☐ Signature of an adult household member
  - ☐ Last four digits of the Social Security Number (SSN) for an adult household member or indication that the adult does not have SSN.
    - **CEP & Provision 2 Non-Base Year:** The SSN field is optional and does not need to be completed.
- Determining reportable income:
  - Any income received on a recurring basis, including earnings, pension, and child or spousal support, must be reported on the application.
    - Gross Income, money earned before deductions, should be reported unless the household member is self-employed.
  - If a household has multiple income sources with varying frequencies (i.e., weekly, biweekly, twice per month, monthly), the annual income should be calculated to determine eligibility by multiplying:
    - Weekly income by 52
    - Bi-weekly income by 26
    - Twice monthly income by 24

        - Monthly income by 12
- Use the USDA Income Guidelines for the current school year to determine eligibility for free or reduced-price meal benefits.

Assistance Program Applications

- The following must be reported on an application to determine benefits based on assistance program services:
  - ☐ Names of children for whom the application is made
  - ☐ SNAP, TANF, or FDPIR case number or identifier for the children or household member listed on the application
    - A valid case number is between 2 to 9 digits (after the leading zeros are dropped) and does not include alphabetic letters
  - ☐ Signature of an adult household member

Application for Children in Foster Care

- The following must be reported on an application to determine eligibility for children in foster care:
  - ☐ Name of the foster child
  - ☐ Indication of the child's foster status
  - ☐ Signature of an adult household member

Processing CNEEB Application Requirements

☐ Process applications within 10 operating days of receipt.
- **Best Practice:** Date stamp applications when received.

☐ Approving officials must complete the 'School Use' only section of the application (unless the information below is captured in the electronic approval system):
- Indicate approval date
- Indicate the level of benefit for which the children or each child is approved
- Sign or initial and date the application

☐ Notify households of their approval or denial of benefits through mail or email
- Use the Notice of Approval/Denial for Pricing Programs or Non-Pricing Programs.

☐ Code the application into CEDARS using the corresponding CEDARS code as noted in Appendix X.

☐ Approve the household for meal benefits for the entire school year.

☐ **Eligibility is effective the date the application is approved** and processed into the LEA's system, unless the LEA is approved for a Flexibility in Effective Date of Eligibility.

☐ **CEP or Provision 2 Non-Base Year only:** Staff time for processing and distributing the CNEEB Application cannot be charged to the non-profit school food service account. Instead, other funding should be used to cover the cost.

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Frequently Asked Questions

1. **How should incomplete applications be handled?**
   If a household provides an incomplete application, the application must be denied. Every reasonable effort should be made by the approving official to obtain the missing information before denying the application. To obtain the required information, the LEA may return the application to the household or contact the child's parent or guardian. The approving official should document the details of the contact, date, and initial on the application.

2. **Is a household required to update their eligibility if they experience a change in their current situation (such as an increase in income)?**
   No. Households are not required to report changes in their circumstances. If the household submits a new application, the LEA must explain to the household that they are not required to report the change due to the year-long duration of eligibility. The change will only go into effect if the household requests the change in writing. The LEA must send a notice of adverse action if benefits are voluntarily decreased.

3. **Should a child in foster care be included in a household's application for their non-foster children?**
   Yes. Households with foster and non-foster children may include the foster child as a household member. If the foster child is included as a household member, any personal income earned by the foster child must be included on the application. The foster child is categorically eligible for free meals, regardless of the eligibility of the foster family's non-foster children.

4. **If a household indicates that they are Homeless or Migrant on the CNEEB application, are they automatically eligible for free meals?**
   No. Indication of homeless or migrant status on a CNEEB application does not automatically qualify the household for free meals. This information must be confirmed by the McKinney-Vento Liaison or Migrant Student Coordinator. If confirmation is unable to be obtained, the application must be processed according to household size and income or receipt of assistance program benefits.

5. **Can a household report their Medicaid or Apple Health ID number on an application to receive free or reduced-price meal benefits.**
   No. Case numbers for SNAP, TANF, and FDPIR are the only assistance programs that can automatically qualify a household for free meal benefits when reported on an application. Households must populate on the Direct Certification Medicaid list in EDS to qualify based on information reported for Medicaid, as only certain Medicaid categories have income standards similar to the USDA Income Eligibility Guidelines.

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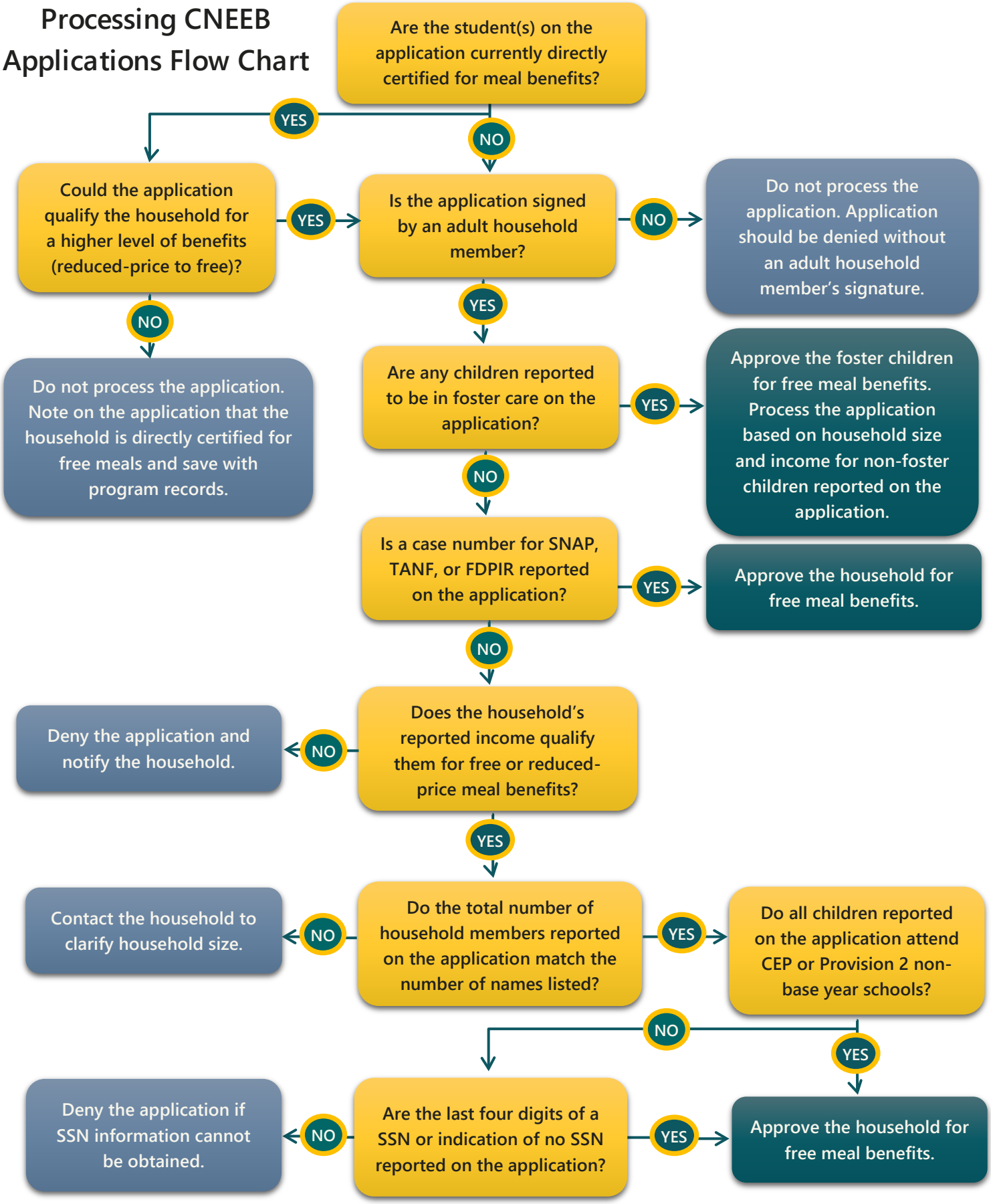
Processing CNEEB Applications Flow Chart



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References

- 7 CFR 245
- USDA Eligibility Manual for School Meals

Resources

- Meal Application and Verification Information
- Flexibility in Determining Effective Date of Eligibility
- How to Fill Out a CNEEB Application
- CEDARS

Acronym Reference

- CEDARS – Comprehensive Education Data and Reporting System
- CEP – Community Eligibility Provision
- CNEEB – Child Nutrition Eligibility & Education Benefit Application
- CNS – Child Nutrition Services
- EDS – Education Data System
- EBT – Electronic Benefit Transfer
- FDPIR – Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations
- LEA – Local Education Agency
- OSPI – Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

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