

SUBJECT: School Year 2023-2024 Free and Reduced Meal Application Notification

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Children need healthy meals to learn. The Navy, through partnership with the Navy Exchange (NEX), offers healthy meals every school day.

Your student may qualify for free or reduced price meals. A meal application is required to be completed each school year in order to determine if your student qualify for free or reduced price meals.

See below for frequently asked questions regarding the Free and Reduced Meal Program:

1. Do I need to fill out an application for each child? No. Complete the application to apply for free or reduced price meals. Use one Free and Reduced Price School Meals Application for all students in your household. We cannot approve an application that is not complete, so be sure to fill out all required information.

You can fill out the application at: <https://linqconnect.com>.

Click Start New Meal Application.

Choose school district **'DODEA – Navy Exchange (Alexandria, Virginia)'** to get started.

2. Who can get free or reduced meals? Any student can apply for free or reduced price meal benefits. Household income is used to determine eligibility based on the USDA Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines. These guidelines can be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/fr-020923>.

3. Can foster children get free meals? Yes, foster children that are under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court, are eligible for free meals. Any foster child in the household is eligible for free meals regardless of income. Documentation from the foster care agency, court or a child welfare caseworker will be used to certify the foster child for free meals.

4. My student's application was approved last year. Do I need to fill out another one? Yes. Your student's application is only good for that school year and for the first 30 days of the new school year. You must complete a new application every school year in order to receive meal benefits.

5. How do I get notified if my student(s) qualified for free or reduced meals? Once you complete and submit a meal application it should be processed within 10 business days. You will be notified of your student's eligibility by letter. Definitions of eligibility are as follows:

Free: Your student qualifies for free meals and will not be charged for meals during the 23-24 school year.

Reduced: Your student qualifies for reduced-priced meals. Your student will be charged \$0.30 for breakfast (if available) and \$0.40 for lunch.

Paid: Your student does not qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. Your student will be required to pay for any meal they receive from the student meal program. Breakfast is \$2.00. Lunch (elementary) is \$3.50 and Lunch (Secondary) is \$3.75.

6. I get WIC. Can my student(s) get free meals? Students in households participating in WIC may be eligible for free or reduced price meals. Please fill out an application in order for meal benefits to be determined.

7. Will the household income information I give be checked? Any completed meal application is subject to the USDA required verification process. Applications are randomly chosen for verification and the households are notified if they have been selected. If selected, income documentation is required to be submitted in order to verify the information submitted on the meal application is accurate. Depending on the results of the verification process, meal benefits may be increased, decreased or remain the same. Results are communicated to every household prior to any change in benefits taking effect.

8. If I don't qualify now, may I apply later? Yes, you may apply or re-apply at any time during the school year. For example, children with a parent or guardian who becomes unemployed may become eligible for free and reduced price meals if the household income drops below the income limit.

9. What if I disagree with the decision about my application? You should talk to Navy CYP officials for next steps on how to request a hearing.

10. Who should I include as members of my household? You must include all people living in your household, related or not (such as grandparents, other relatives, or friends) who share income and expenses. You must include yourself and all children living with you. If you live with other people who are economically independent (for example, people who you do not support, who do not share income with you or your children, and who pay a pro-rated share of expenses), do not include them. Deployed Services members will be included.

11. What if my income is not always the same? List the amount that you normally receive. For example, if you normally make \$1000 each month, but you missed some work last month and only made \$900, put down that you made \$1000 per month. If you normally get overtime, include it, but do not include it if you only work overtime sometimes. If you have lost a job or had your hours or wages reduced, use your current income.

12. We are in the military. Do we include our housing allowance as income? If you get an off-base housing allowance, it must be included as income. However, if your housing is part of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, do not include your housing allowance as income.

13. My spouse is deployed to a combat zone. Is their combat pay counted as income? No, if the combat pay is received in addition to their basic pay because of their deployment and it wasn't received before they were deployed, combat pay is not counted as income. Contact your school for more information.

14. My child is in Sure Start, do I need to fill out an application? No. Sure Start students are categorically eligible for free meals. However, other students in the household will need to complete an application.

15. What should be included in my income? Households must report current income on a free and reduced price application. Current income means income received by the household for the current

month, the amount projected for the first month for which the application is filled out or for the month prior to application. If this income is higher or lower than usual and does not fairly or accurately represent the household's actual circumstances, the household may, in conjunction with REVIEWING OFFICIAL officials, project its annual rate of income based on the guidelines on special situations.

16. What military benefits are included in the income? Benefits paid directly to the service person such as housing allowances and food or clothing allowances, are considered income.

17. What military benefits are excluded from the income? The following benefits are excluded from the income: Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance, privatized housing allowances, combat pay, payments received from a foster care agency, student financial assistance provided for the costs of attending an educational institution, loans, infrequent earnings received on an irregular basis.

If you have other questions or need help, please notify your local School Liaison Officer (gtmosl@us.navy.mil).

Sincerely,

NEX Student Meal Program

www.mynavyexchange.com/smp