

**This information does not apply to schools that participate in the
Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)**

**Division of Food and Nutrition Services
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Guidelines for the Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS)
Application Process 2023–2024**

Distribution: Schools should distribute the FARMS parent letter to all students on the first day of school. A small supply of paper application forms will be delivered to each school the week of August 21, 2023. **Paper applications should only be distributed to parents who request a paper application.** Families should only complete one application for the household. **Families should be encouraged to apply online at www.MySchoolApps.com instead of completing the paper application.**

Start-up Process: Student meal eligibility from the 2022–2023 school year will carry over into the 2023–2024 school year through **October 11, 2023** or until a new application is processed. **After that, if a student has not newly qualified for free or reduced-price meals, meals will be charged at the regular meal prices.**

Application Process:

- **ONLINE APPLICATIONS are the fastest and safest way to apply for FARMS. Households are encouraged to apply online at www.MySchoolApps.com.** The online application and instructions are available in various languages.
- **SCANNED PAPER APPLICATIONS:** A limited supply of paper application will be available in English and Spanish and should only be distributed to parents who request a paper application. Paper applications are electronically scanned. Only ORIGINAL applications can be processed. **Please do not duplicate applications at the school.** If you need additional applications, contact the Division of Food and Nutrition Services (DFNS) at 240-740-7400 or DFNSOffice@mcpsmd.org.
- Use only one application (online or paper) for all children in a household who attend Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), even if the students attend different schools.
- As federal government information on the application changes every year, **only the 2023–2024 applications may be used. Please immediately discard all application forms from previous years.**
- Students may apply for meal benefits at **any time** during the school year.
- Applications **cannot** be approved over the telephone per program regulation.

Who Should Apply: Households are not required to apply for meal benefits. However, all households who think they may be eligible are encouraged to apply. Income eligibility information is listed on the back of the application. **A new application is required for each household applying for free or reduced-price meals.** Households complete an application only if they wish to apply for free or reduced-price meals.

Direct Certification: Some students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals through direct certification because their household receives the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), or Medicaid benefits. Students who have been identified as directly certified should still apply for FARMS to assure all students in the household receive the same benefit.

Where to Send Paper Applications: Please send completed, original paper applications via the Pony to DFNS, 8401 Turkey Thicket Drive, Gaithersburg, as soon as they are received to avoid a delay in processing.

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Transfer Students: When a student transfers between schools within MCPS, his or her meal eligibility also transfers. When a student transfers from a school outside of Montgomery County and was on a free or reduced status, please have the household complete an application.

Homeless/Migrant/Runaway Students: Students who are deemed homeless, runaway, or are enrolled in the Migrant Education Program qualify to receive free meals. Please complete *MCPS Form 335-77 Homeless Status* and submit it to the residency office as soon as possible. The residency office notifies DFNS daily of students who are deemed homeless, runaway, or migrant. For more information, contact the MCPS Homeless Liaison at 240-740-4511.

Confidentiality of FARMS Eligibility Data: Meal eligibility is confidential information. DFNS, including cafeteria managers, cannot disclose meal eligibility information. Federal regulations governing school meal programs require that a student's eligibility for FARMS services will be used only to provide meal benefits. Access to an individual child's eligibility may not be used to extend other benefits or services, including tuition waivers or assistance with outdoor education or field trip fees. Official aggregated FARMS statistics are available after November through DFNS.

Verification: In October 2023, households approved for FARMS will be selected randomly for verification of income. Households selected will receive a letter notifying them of their selection and the information needed to comply with the verification process.

Notification of Application Determination: Once an application is processed, or a direct certification is established, a *Notice of Action Taken* is mailed to the parent/guardian of each student at the address on file in Synergy. Parents may use this document as proof of FARMS eligibility for the entire school year. If a parent needs a duplicate copy of this notice, they may contact DFNS at 240-740-7400. Copies will be mailed to the address on file in Synergy for the student. This notice may be requested by the parent/guardian of the student, a student aged 18 years or older, or other adult household member listed on the FARMS application.

Additional Information: Please remember that households must apply each year. Federal income guidelines for meal eligibility are revised annually. Students who were eligible for meal benefits last year may not be eligible this school year. FARMS utilizes pupil database files; therefore, promptness in enrolling, withdrawing, or transferring students is essential. Households new to the county must be given application information upon enrolling. Each new student must have an identification number in order to process a FARMS application. Students transferring within MCPS, if eligible, will appear on the cafeteria manager's accountability system and do not need to reapply.

Our goal is to have as many households as possible complete the application online. Staff may assist parents in completing the online or paper application but may not complete or submit applications on behalf of a family without the parent/guardian being present at the time the application is being completed.

Questions: If you have any questions, please contact DFNS at 240-740-7400 or via email at DFNSOffice@mcpsmd.org.