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that they do not want free benefits must have their benefits discontinued as soon as possible. Any notification from the household declining benefits must be documented and maintained on file, in accordance with paragraph (e) of this section. Additionally, a school food authority that is notified by the household that they are no longer eligible to receive food stamp, FDPIR or TANF benefits must follow the procedures specified in §245.6a(e), and inform the household that it must submit an application with income information to establish continued eligibility.

(2) *Notice of denial.* When the application furnished by the family is not fully documented or does not meet the eligibility criteria for free or reduced price benefits, school officials shall promptly provide written notice to each family denied benefits. As a minimum, this notice shall include:

(i) The reason for the denial of benefits, e.g. income in excess of allowable limits or incomplete application; (ii) notification of the right to appeal; (iii) instructions on how to appeal; and (iv) a statement reminding parents that they may reapply for free and reduced price benefits at any time during the school year. The reasons for ineligibility shall be properly documented and retained on file at the School Food Authority.

(3) *Appeals of denied benefits.* A family who wishes to appeal a denied application by the School Food Authority may do so as specified in §245.7. However, prior to initiating the hearing procedure, the parent may request a conference to provide the opportunity for the parent and school officials to discuss the situation, present information, and obtain an explanation of the data submitted in the application or the decision rendered. The request for a conference shall not in any way prejudice or diminish the right to a fair hearing. The School Food Authority shall promptly schedule a fair hearing, if requested.

(d) After the letter to parents and the applications have been disseminated, the School Food Authority may determine, based on information available to it, that a child for whom an application has not been submitted meets the

School Food Authority's eligibility criteria for free and reduced price meals or for free milk. In such a situation, the School Food Authority shall complete and file an application for such child setting forth the basis of determining the child's eligibility. When a School Food Authority has obtained a determination of individual family income and family-size data from other sources, it need not require the submission of an application for any child from a family whose income would qualify for free or reduced price meals or for free milk under the School Food Authority's established criteria. In such event, the School Food Authority shall notify the family that its children are eligible for free or reduced price meals or for free milk. Nothing in this paragraph shall be deemed to provide authority for the School Food Authority to make eligibility determinations or certifications by categories or groups of children.

(e) The school food authority must maintain documentation substantiating eligibility determinations on file for 3 years after the date of the fiscal year to which they pertain, except that if audit findings have not been resolved, the documentation must be maintained as long as required for resolution of the issues raised by the audit.

(Sec. 803, Pub. L. 97-35, 95 Stat. 521-535 (42 U.S.C. 1758))

[35 FR 14065, Sept. 4, 1970, as amended at 38 FR 14957, June 7, 1973; Amdt. 6, 39 FR 30338, Aug. 22, 1974; Amdt. 9, 41 FR 26192, June 25, 1976; Amdt. 19, 45 FR 67287, Oct. 10, 1980; 47 FR 31853, July 23, 1982; 49 FR 26034, June 26, 1984; 52 FR 19275, May 22, 1987; 55 FR 19240, May 9, 1990; 56 FR 32950, July 17, 1991; 56 FR 33860, July 24, 1991; 64 FR 72472, Dec. 28, 1999]

§ 245.6a Verification requirements.

(a) *Verification requirement.* School officials may seek verification of the information on the application. State agencies shall ensure that by December 15 of each School Year, School Food Authorities have selected and verified a sample of their approved free and reduced price applications in accordance with the conditions and procedures described in this section. Verification activity may begin at the start of the

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school year but the final required sample size shall be based on the number of approved applications on file as of October 31. Any extensions to these deadlines must be approved in writing by FNS. School Food Authorities are required to satisfy the verification requirement by using either random sampling or focused sampling as described below. *Random* sampling consists of verifying a minimum of the lesser of 3 percent or 3,000 applications which are selected by the School Food Authority. *Focused* sampling consists of selecting and verifying a minimum of: the lesser of 1 percent or 1,000 of total applications selected from non-food stamp households claiming monthly income within \$100 or yearly income within \$1200 of the income eligibility limit for free or reduced price meals; plus the lesser of one half of 1 percent (.5%) or 500 applications of food stamp, FDPIR or TANF households that provided a food stamp or TANF case number or FDPIR case number or other identifier in lieu of income information. A State may require all School Food Authorities to perform either random or focused sampling. School Food Authorities may choose to verify up to 100 percent of all applications to improve program integrity. Any State may, with the written approval of FNS, assume responsibility for complying with the verification requirements of this part within any of its School Food Authorities. When assuming such responsibility, States may utilize alternate approaches to verification provided that such verification meets the requirements of this part.

(1) *Confirmation of income information.* Verification efforts shall not delay the approval of applications. An application must be approved if it contains the essential information specified in § 245.2(a-4) and, if applicable, the household meets the income eligibility criteria for free or reduced price benefits. When written evidence or collateral contacts are the primary sources of information, the School Food Authority shall require the submission of income information for the most recent full month that is available. However, when using a system of records, the School Food Authority may choose a recent month to verify and the entire

sample may be verified for the same month. Households which dispute the validity of income information acquired through systems of records shall be given the opportunity to produce more recent income information.

(2) *Notification of selection.* Households selected to provide verification shall be provided written notice that their applications have been selected for verification and that they are required, by such date as determined by the school food authority, to submit the requested verification information to confirm eligibility for free or reduced price meals. These households shall be advised of the type or types of information and/or documents acceptable to the school. This information must include a social security number for each adult household member or an indication that such member does not have one. School food authorities shall inform selected households that:

(i) Section 9 of the National School Lunch Act requires that unless the child's food stamp case number/FDPIR case number or other identifier or TANF case number is provided, households selected for verification must provide the social security number of each adult household member;

(ii) In lieu of providing a social security number, an adult household member may indicate that he/she does not possess one;

(iii) Provision of a social security number is not mandatory but if a social security number is not provided for each adult household member or an indication is not made that he/she does not possess one, benefits will be terminated;

(iv) The social security numbers may be used to identify household members in carrying out efforts to verify the correctness of information stated on the application and continued eligibility for the program. These verification efforts may be carried out through program reviews, audits, and investigations and may include contacting a food stamp, FDPIR or TANF office to determine current certification for receipt of these benefits, contacting the State employment security office to determine the amount of benefits received and checking documentation produced by household

members to prove the amount of income received. These verification efforts may be carried out through program reviews, audits, and investigations and may include contacting employers to determine income, contacting a food stamp or welfare office to determine current certification for receipt of food stamps or AFDC benefits, contacting the State employment security office to determine the amount of benefits received and checking the documentation produced by household members to prove the amount of income received.

(v) This information must be provided to the attention of each adult household member disclosing his/her social security number. State agencies and school food authorities shall ensure that the notice complies with section 7 of Pub. L. 93-579 (Privacy Act of 1974). These households shall be provided with the name and phone number of a school official who can assist in the verification effort. Selected households must also be informed that, in lieu of any information that would otherwise be required, they can submit proof of current food stamp, FDPIR or TANF certification as described in paragraph (a)(3) of this section to verify the free meal eligibility of a child who is a member of a food stamp, FDPIR or TANF household. All households selected for verification shall be advised that failure to cooperate with verification efforts will result in the termination of benefits.

(3) *Food stamp, FDPIR or TANF recipients.* On applications where households have furnished food stamp or TANF case numbers or FDPIR case numbers or other identifiers, verification shall be accomplished either by confirming with the local food stamp, FDPIR, or TANF office that each child, for whom application was made and a case number or other identifier was provided, is a member of a currently certified food stamp, FDPIR or TANF household; or by obtaining from the household a copy of a current "Notice of Eligibility" for the Food Stamp Program, FDPIR or TANF Program or equivalent official documentation issued by the food stamp, FDPIR or TANF office which confirms that the child is a member of a currently certified food stamp,

FDPIR or TANF household. An identification card for either program is not acceptable as verification unless it contains an expiration date. If it is not established that the child is a member of a currently certified food stamp, TANF or FDPIR household, the procedures for adverse action specified in paragraph (e) of this section must be followed. The notification of forthcoming termination of benefits provided to such households shall include a request for household income information and for written evidence which confirms household income to assist those households in establishing continued eligibility for free meal benefits.

(4) *Household cooperation.* If a household refuses to cooperate with efforts to verify, eligibility for free or reduced price benefits shall be terminated in accordance with § 245.6a(e). Households which refuse to complete the verification process and which are consequently determined ineligible for such benefits shall be counted toward meeting the School Food Authority's required sample of verified households.

(5) *Exceptions from verification.* Verification efforts are not required in residential child care institutions; schools in which FNS has approved special cash assistance claims based on economic statistics regarding per capita income; or schools in which all children are served with no separate charge for food service and no special cash assistance is claimed. School Food Authorities in which all schools participate in the Special Assistance Certification and Reimbursement Alternatives specified in § 245.9 shall meet the verification requirement only in those years in which applications are taken for all children in attendance. Verification of eligibility is not required of households when the determination of eligibility was based on documentation provided by the State or local agency responsible for the administration of the Food Stamp Program, FDPIR or TANF Program, as described in § 245.6(b).

(b) *Sources of information.* Sources of information for verification may include written evidence, collateral contacts, and systems of records.

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(1) *Written evidence.* Written evidence shall be used as the primary source of information for verification. Written evidence includes written confirmation of a household's circumstances, such as wage stubs, award letters, and letters from employers. Whenever written evidence is insufficient to confirm income information on the application or current eligibility, the school may require collateral contacts.

(2) *Collateral contact.* Collateral contact is a verbal confirmation of a household's circumstances by a person outside of the household. The collateral contact may be made by person or by phone. The verifying official may select a collateral contact if the household fails to designate one or designates one which is unacceptable to the verifying official. If the verifying official designates a collateral contact, the contact shall not be made without providing written or oral notice to the household. At the time of this notice, the household shall be informed that it may consent to the contact or provide acceptable verification in another form. If the household refuses to choose one of these options, its eligibility shall be terminated in accordance with the normal procedures for failure to cooperate with verification efforts. Collateral contacts could include employers, social service agencies, and migrant agencies.

(3) *Agency records.* Agency records to which the State agency or School Food Authority may have access are not considered collateral contacts. Information concerning income, household size, or food stamp, FDIPIR, or TANF eligibility maintained by other government agencies to which the State agency, school food authority or school can legally gain access may be used to confirm a household's income, size, or receipt of benefits. One possible source could be wage and benefit information maintained by the State employment agency, if that information is available. The use of any information derived from other agencies must be used with the applicable safeguards concerning disclosure.

(c) *Verification recordkeeping.* School Food Authorities verifying applications shall maintain on file for review

a description of the verification to be accomplished beginning School Year 1983-84. The description shall include:

(1) A summary of the verification efforts including the techniques to be used;

(2) the total number of applications on file by October 31;

(3) the percentage or number of applications verified;

(4) all verified applications must be readily retrievable by school and include all documents submitted by the household in an effort to confirm eligibility, reproductions of those documents, or annotations made by the determining official which indicate which documents were submitted by the household and the date of submission;

(5) documentation of any changes in eligibility and the reasons for the changes; and

(6) all relevant correspondences between the household selected for verification and the school food authority/school.

(d) *Nondiscrimination.* The verification efforts shall be applied without regard to race, sex, color, national origin, age, or disability.

(e) *Adverse action.* If verification activities fail to confirm eligibility for free or reduced price benefits or should the household fail to cooperate with verification efforts, the school or School Food Authority shall reduce or terminate benefits, as applicable, as follows: Ten days advance notification shall be provided to households that are to receive a reduction or termination of benefits, prior to the actual reduction or termination. The first day of the 10 day advance notice period shall be the day the notice is sent. The notice shall advise the household of:

(1) The change; (2) the reasons for the change; (3) notification of the right to appeal and when the appeal must be filed to ensure continued benefits while awaiting a hearing and decision; (4) instructions on how to appeal; and (5) the right to reapply at any time during the school year. The reasons for ineligibility shall be properly documented

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and retained on file at the School Food Authority.

(Sec. 803, Pub. L. 97-35, 95 Stat. 521-535 (42 U.S.C. 1758))

[48 FR 12510, Mar. 25, 1983, as amended at 49 FR 26034, June 26, 1984; 52 FR 19275, May 22, 1987; 55 FR 19240, May 9, 1990; 56 FR 32950, July 17, 1991; 56 FR 33861, July 24, 1991; 64 FR 50744, Sept. 20, 1999; 64 FR 72474, Dec. 28, 1999]

§ 245.7 Hearing procedure for families and School Food Authorities.

(a) Each School Food Authority of a school participating in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program or the Special Milk Program or of a commodity only school shall establish a hearing procedure under which:

(1) A family can appeal from a decision made by the School Food Authority with respect to an application the family has made for free or reduced price meals or for free milk, and (2) the School Food Authority can challenge the continued eligibility of any child for a free or reduced price meal or for free milk. The hearing procedure shall provide for both the family and the School Food Authority:

(i) A simple, publicly announced method to make an oral or written request for a hearing;

(ii) An opportunity to be assisted or represented by an attorney or other person;

(iii) An opportunity to examine, prior to and during the hearing, any documents and records presented to support the decision under appeal;

(iv) That the hearing shall be held with reasonable promptness and convenience, and that adequate notice shall be given as to the time and place of the hearing;

(v) An opportunity to present oral or documentary evidence and arguments supporting a position without undue interference;

(vi) An opportunity to question or refute any testimony or other evidence and to confront and cross-examine any adverse witnesses;

(vii) That the hearing shall be conducted and the decision made by a hearing official who did not participate in making the decision under appeal or in any previously held conference;

(viii) That the decision of the hearing official shall be based on the oral and documentary evidence presented at the hearing and made a part of the hearing record;

(ix) That the parties concerned and any designated representative shall be notified in writing of the decision of the hearing official;

(x) That a written record shall be prepared with respect to each hearing, which shall include the challenge or the decision under appeal, any documentary evidence and a summary of any oral testimony presented at the hearing, the decision of the hearing official, including the reasons therefor, and a copy of the notification to the parties concerned of the decision of the hearing official; and

(xi) That the written record of each hearing shall be preserved for a period of 3 years and shall be available for examination by the parties concerned or their representatives at any reasonable time and place during that period.

(b) *Continuation of benefits.* When a household disagrees with an adverse action which affects its benefits and requests a fair hearing, benefits shall be continued as follows while the household awaits the hearing and decision:

(1) Households that have been approved for benefits and that are subject to a reduction or termination of benefits later in the same school year shall receive continued benefits if they appeal the adverse action within the 10 day advance notice period; and

(2) Households that are denied benefits upon application shall not receive benefits.

(44 U.S.C. 3506; sec. 803, Pub. L. 97-35, 95 Stat. 521-535 (42 U.S.C. 1758))

[Amdt. 6, 39 FR 30339, Aug. 22, 1974, as amended at 47 FR 746, Jan. 7, 1982; 48 FR 12511, Mar. 25, 1983]

§ 245.8 Nondiscrimination practices for children eligible to receive free and reduced price meals and free milk.

School Food Authorities of schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program or Special Milk Program or of commodity only schools shall take all actions that are necessary to insure