

Documenting Site Eligibility in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

Documenting Area Eligibility for Open or Restricted Open Site

The two primary sources of data used to determine whether the area that will be served is eligible are school data or census data.

A. School Data:

The easiest way to obtain the current year's free and reduced-price data to document the eligibility of the area is by using the annual *School Data Determining Site Eligibility* list available on the SFSP website. In most cases, current-year school data provides the most accurate representation of an area's current economic situation.

Also, the local public school district and non-profit private schools serving the area in which a sponsor intends to offer the SFSP may provide sponsors with the number of children who are eligible for free and reduced-price NSLP and/or SBP meals and the total enrollment(s) of the school(s).

The sponsors may also contact the State Agency to obtain the free and reduced-price data to establish the site eligibility.

To qualify sites sponsors may use data from nearby elementary, middle, or high school (elementary data is preferred). If the percentage of children eligible to receive a free or reduced-price meal is equal to or higher than 50 percent of the school enrollment, the site is eligible to participate in the SFSP.

As part of the application process (Site Information Sheet), the sponsor must submit to the State Agency the number of the public school used to establish eligibility.

Busing based on school attendance:

In certain situations, children in public school systems are routinely "bused" from their neighborhood school to schools outside the attendance area of their neighborhood school. This may result a site located in an area in which poor economic conditions exist to be designated as ineligible based on enrollment data that has been adjusted to reflect student reassignment. This situation may occur in any program in which site eligibility is based on the percentage of children eligible for free and reduced-price meals. In this case, contact the State Agency and the site eligibility will be determined based on the eligibility data of either:

- the school the children attend and are being bused to, or
- the school the children would have attended where it not for the school's busing policy—the neighborhood school where the children live (SFSP Policy; Effects of Bussing on Area Eligibility, May 20, 2003).

B. Census Data:

Sponsors may also document the area eligibility of their proposed open or restricted open site on the basis of census data. However, sponsors are encouraged to use school data rather than census data because it is more current, and represents neighborhood economic conditions with a greater accuracy. There may be certain circumstances that warrant the use of census data to establish area eligibility even when current-year local school data is available. Some of these circumstances include:

- The potential site is located in a rural area, where geographically large elementary school attendance areas obscure localized “pockets of poverty,” which can be identified through the use of Census Block Group (CBG) data.
- Available current-year school data shows an area to be close to, but under, the 50 percent threshold, and the CBG data may reveal specific portions of the school’s attendance area that are SFSP eligible.
- Mandatory busing has affected the percentage of children in the neighborhood schools who are eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and the school is unable to “factor out” the pupils bused in from other areas and provide the sponsor with data on the percentage of free and reduced-price eligible children living in the school’s immediate neighborhood.

In any of these circumstances, use of the local CBG data contained in the computerized special tabulation may help sponsors to more precisely document the area eligibility of their proposed sites. The data is from 2000, but in some cases the increased level of detail available using CBG data can help to identify more clearly the “pockets of poverty”. Sponsors wishing to use census data to determine site eligibility should notify the State Agency and request more specific guidance from the State agency.

Documenting Camp Site Eligibility

Sponsors that operate residential summer camps and nonresidential day camps offering both organized programming and a regularly scheduled food service may participate in the SFSP. Nonresidential day camps may participate only as sites under eligible sponsoring organizations. Unlike other types of sites, camps do not have to establish income eligibility at the 50 percent level, which open, restricted open, or closed enrolled sites must do. Camps are reimbursed only for meals served to children who meet the income eligibility criteria. In order to determine eligibility for children, camp sponsors must use the Meal Benefit/Income Eligibility Forms (available in the Administrative Guidance for Sponsors and on the SFSP website) or on list(s) of income eligible children provided by the school system.

Sponsors of camps are not required to submit the approved individual eligibility forms or school lists of eligible children to the State agency. However, they must maintain the lists or original approved forms for all eligible children in separate files for each camp session, and the documents must be available to the State Agency reviewer.

Documenting Closed Enrolled Site Eligibility

To qualify as a closed enrolled site, at least 50 percent of the enrolled children must be from households that meet the income eligibility guidelines. Sponsors can document an enrolled site’s eligibility by:

- Obtaining lists by name and eligibility status of enrolled children for free and reduced-price meals from schools where the children receive school lunch or breakfast. Parental consent forms are not required in order for the local School Food Authority (SFA) to provide this information to SFSP sponsors;

- Asking the parent or guardian of each enrolled child to complete an income eligibility form (available in the Administrative Guidance for Sponsors and the SFSP website);
- Using “area” eligibility data for the location of the site, rather than using the income eligibility form to document that at least half of the enrolled children at each site are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. (This option is not available for camps.); (SFSP Policy; Closed Enrolled Sites, November 17, 2002);
- Using census data when the site is located outside of an eligible area.

As part of the application process (Site Information Sheet), sponsors of closed enrolled sites must provide the State agency with:

- an estimate of the total number of children enrolled at the site; and
- an estimate of the number of children enrolled at the site that are documented as eligible for free or reduced price school meals, unless using area eligible data.

Sponsors of closed enrolled sites must have the following information on file for each site:

- records of the total number of children enrolled at the site; and
- list(s) of income eligible children provided by the school system; or the actual eligibility forms for income eligible children

Migrant Site Documentation Instruction

If the sponsor is applying to provide meals to children of migrant farm worker families, the following information must be submitted along with the SFSP application:

1. Documentation that the site primarily serves meals to the migrant children. It may be in the form of a letter from the appropriate migrant organization. The letter must include a statement that the site serves migrant children of migrant farm workers families.
2. If the site also serves nonmigrant children, the sponsor must certify that the site predominantly serves migrant children.

Other Data

If sponsors are unable to document the need of their area or site(s) by using sources such as current-year school data, census tract (CBG data), enrollment data, or migrant children status, they should consult with their State agency about the possibility of using other types of data such as the local zoning data, housing authority information or economic surveys to document site eligibility.

Also, sponsors offering the program at sites located on Indian reservations may obtain and submit statistics on the population from one of the 12 Bureaus of Indian Affairs area offices.

NOTE:

Schools which plan to operate the SFSP in conjunction with an accredited school programs **MUST** open the food service to all children in the community. This includes schools offering standard summer school classes, and providing classes for migrant children and/or children with disabilities.