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POLICY UPDATE



02.06.2018 Agency Information Collection Activities: Proposed Collection; Comments Request-Evaluation of the Independent Review of Applications Process for School Meal Programs

In a [Federal Register notice](#) on February 6, 2018, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced a new information collection to study the effectiveness of the Independent Review of Applications (IRA) requirement. The IRAs are conducted by local educational agencies (LEAs), which are identified by the state agency as demonstrating high levels of, or a high risk for, administrative error in the verification of free and reduced-price applications. This study will provide USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) with valuable information about the IRA process at the state and LEA levels. Results will allow FNS to identify best practices and improvements for the IRA. Comments are due April 9, and can be submitted via the [Regulations.gov](#) website.

02.20.2018 Food Crediting in Child Nutrition Programs: Request for Information; Extension of Comment Period

In a [Federal Register Notice](#) published on February 17, 2018, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) announced that they were extending the comment period for the Food Crediting in Child Nutrition Programs: Request for Information (RFI). The information collection, as previously reported in Tuesday Morning, intended to help FNS gather feedback from stakeholders on how the crediting system can be improved, as well as to offer customer service to those operating and benefitting from the Child Nutrition Programs (CNP). The new due date for comments is April 23, 2018, and can be submitted through the [Federal Register](#).

03.05.2018 Reducing School Meal Certification Error through Improved Online Application Design

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service released a memo titled [Reducing School Meal Certification Error through Improved Online Application Design](#). The memo is intended to offer guidance to States, local operators, and their software vendors on strategies for leveraging the design flexibilities of online free and reduced price school meal applications to reduce household reporting mistakes and certification errors. USDA's most current research finds that one in five applicants for school meal benefits are certified incorrectly, so USDA is encouraging local education agencies (LEAs) and their software vendors to take full advantage of the interactive online environment when developing or updating their online applications. Accuracy in the certification process is a top priority for USDA, and the guidance offers Q&A to ensure this is achievable.

03.06.2018 Hiring Flexibility Under Professional Standards

The USDA Food and Nutrition Services have proposed a [Rule](#) adding four flexibilities to the hiring standards for new school nutrition program directors in small local educational agencies (LEAs) and new school nutrition program State directors under the professional standards regulations.

Questions or comments?

Send them to SNA's Government Affairs Team at advocacy@schoolnutrition.org

The Rule is intended to address hiring challenges faced by small school districts when searching for qualified applicants. “Small and rural school districts will no longer have to overlook qualified food service professionals because of one-size-fits-all standards that don’t meet their needs.” said Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, Steve Censky.

USDA is providing a 60-day [public comment period](#) before they develop the Final Rule. You can read the USDA press release [here](#).

03.15.2018 Community Eligibility Provision: Statutory Annual Notification and Publication Requirements

USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) released its [annual notice](#) regarding the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). The memo details guidance on CEP and publication requirements, and also provides information on the USDA-developed reporting template. The memo also serves as a reminder that State agencies have a statutory June 30 election deadline for local educational agencies (LEAs) to elect CEP. By May 1 of each year, State agencies must publish lists of eligible and near-eligible LEAs and schools on their State agency websites. The memo goes on to outline the data collections and levels required to complete the notification process, as well as various deadlines for different requirements. State agencies are reminded to distribute [this memorandum](#) and [attachment](#) to program operators immediately.

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