

Background

This report summarizes the results of the school year (SY) 2007-2008 application verification process for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program. Each year, Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) review a sample of applications that they approved for free or reduced-price school meal benefits at the start of the school year.

Households do not provide documentation of income or participation in means-tested public assistance programs at the time they submit applications for school meal benefits. However, if selected for verification review, households must submit such documentation to maintain their free or reduced-price certifications.

Households whose benefits are to be reduced or terminated as a result of the verification process are given an opportunity to appeal. In addition, households remain free to reapply for benefits at any time.

Verification Summary Report Data

Verification Summary Reports are compiled by the States and submitted annually to FNS. Each report record summarizes the verification results for the sample of approved applications selected by an LEA for review.

NSLP rules provide for three verification sampling methods. The standard method requires LEAs to select the lesser of 3 percent or 3,000 approved applications. LEAs using the standard method must select first from the pool of error-prone applications (those with reported incomes near program eligibility thresholds). LEAs with low or improved verification nonresponse rates may use one of two alternate sampling methods. The alternate random option allows for the selection of 3 percent or 3,000 applications drawn at random from the full population of approved applications. The

alternate focused method allows for the selection of fewer applications, but requires that they be drawn from the error-prone population.

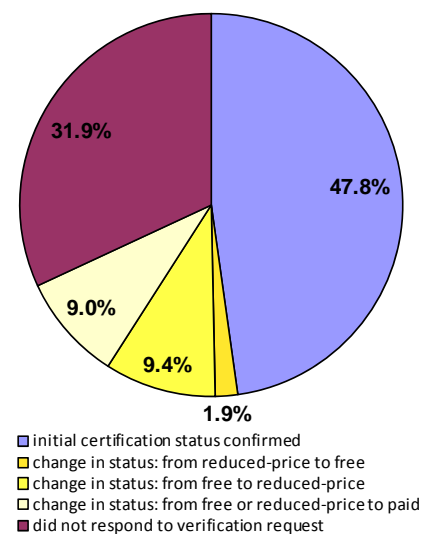
Summary of Findings

SY 2007-2008 verification outcomes:

LEAs selected nearly 300,000 SY 2007-08 household applications for review.

- LEAs confirmed the initial free or reduced-price certifications of 48 percent of sampled applications.
- LEAs determined that the initial certifications for 20 percent of sampled applications were not supported by documentation submitted by households.
- The initial free or reduced-price certifications for 32 percent of sampled applications were withdrawn because households failed to respond to LEA requests for documentation.

Figure 1
Verification Outcomes, SY 2007-2008
297,148 applications selected for review



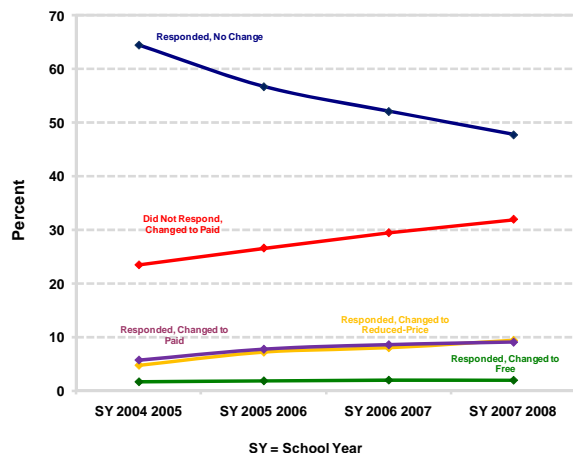
Trends in verification outcomes:

The States began submitting results of LEA verification efforts to FNS in SY 2004-05.

From SY 2004-05 to SY 2007-08:

- The share of sampled applications whose initial certifications were confirmed through verification dropped from 65 percent to 48 percent.
- The rate of household nonresponse to LEA requests for documentation increased from 23 percent to 32 percent.

Figure 2
Change in Verification Outcomes
SY 2004-2005 to SY 2007-2008



One development that has contributed to these trends is the change in program rules, mandated by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, that requires most LEAs to select their verification samples from the

subpopulation of error-prone applications, rather than from the general population of approved applications.

Another important development is the growing use of direct certification of children in households that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamp Program) benefits. Under the 2004 Reauthorization Act, LEAs must establish systems to approve SNAP participant children for free school meals without applications. All LEAs with at least 10,000 students were subject to the direct certification mandate in SY 2007-08. Smaller LEAs must begin direct certification of SNAP children by SY 2008-09.

Since SY 2004-05, the share of all children approved for free school meals by direct certification has grown from 26 percent to 34 percent. Over this same period, the share of children approved for free meals through the traditional application process has dropped from 67 percent to 60 percent.

Because applicants who are directly certified for free school meals are not subject to verification, LEAs are able to concentrate their verification efforts on applicants whose eligibility for free or reduced-price meals is less certain.

As LEAs and State education agencies further develop their direct certification systems, the pool of applicants subject to verification will get smaller. Those who remain will tend to have higher incomes than directly certified SNAP participants, or may be less able or less willing to provide documentation.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis. *Analysis of Verification Summary Data, School Year 2007-08*. Dennis Ranalli, Edward Harper, and Jay Hirschman, Alexandria, VA, October 2009.

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