

Even Start Free Meal Eligibility for Children

The Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 were reauthorized on June 30, 2004 by the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004 (Public Law 108-255). According Barbara Semper of the Food and Nutrition Service, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, P.L. 108-265 did not change the manner in which we treat children in Head Start or Even Start.

The current legislative citations governing the automatic eligibility criteria for these children is sec. 9(b)(12)(A), sec. 17(c)(5) and sec. 17(c)(6) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 USC 1758(b)(12)(A), 42 USC 1766(c)(5) and (6)). (There was some renumbering of paragraphs due to the amendments made by the reauthorization legislation.

Categorical eligibility for Head Start and Even Start children:

Children enrolled in the Federally-funded Head Start program who meet the low-income criteria of the Head Start Program regulations are automatically eligible for free meals in schools and institutions that participate in the Federal school nutrition programs, Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).

Children enrolled in a Federally-funded Even Start Program as a participant and who are at the pre-kindergarten level are categorically eligible for the programs listed above when the children are at a school or institution that participates in the child nutrition programs.

Categorical eligibility does not apply to other family members and once a child enters kindergarten the child loses his or her categorical eligibility. Documentation provided by a Head Start/Even Start official of children's participation in a Federally-funded Head Start or Even Start program from the Head Start or Even Start officials could include:

- An approved Even Start or Head Start application,
- A statement or list of enrolled children participating in Head Start or Even Start, and
- For Even Start, confirmation that the children have not yet entered kindergarten.

Very Young Even Start children:

The statutory "categorical eligibility" for free and reduced price meals applies to any child enrolled in an Even Start program, no matter how young, up until the time that the child enters kindergarten. When the child enters kindergarten, the family then must document the child's income eligibility in the same manner as for all other children qualifying for food and nutrition services. As to what type of nutrition services are available that are appropriate for very young children, you might find it helpful to discuss that matter with the school providing the meals, or contact your regional Food and Nutrition Service representative (see the list at

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/fdd/contacts/fnsro-contacts.htm>. In addition,

further information also is available on the Food and Nutrition Service website at www.fns.usda.gov.

Even Start Adults:

There are no special provisions for eligibility of Even Start adults for free meals in any of the programs funded through federal food and nutrition appropriations. They are eligible or ineligible the same as any other adult. There is no categorical eligibility for adults. For an adult to be eligible for the school nutrition program, the adult must meet the definition of child - basically a student of high school grade or under, enrolled in a school and working towards a high school diploma or in a GED program at a school during regular school hours. Adults may be eligible for CACFP if they meet the definition of adult participant (must be enrolled in an adult day care center and be functionally impaired or 60 years of age or older - see 226.2); adults may be eligible for SFSP if they are over 18, are determined by a State educational agency or local public educational agency to be mentally or physically handicapped, and participate in a public or private nonprofit school program established for the mentally or physically handicapped.