Use of School Year Household Data to Document Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Site Eligibility

At the recent national SFSP meeting in Kansas City, several questions arose regarding the use of household data collected by school food authorities (SFAs) during the school year to document the eligibility of enrolled SFSP sites. The purpose of this memorandum is to address the specific questions which related to the use by SFSP sponsors of free and reduced price applications and eligibility information collected by schools via the "direct certification" method authorized by Public Law (P.L.) 101-147.

Use of Direct Certification Information Collected by SFAs

SFAs that use direct certification during the school year may use that information to document the eligibility of enrolled SPSP sites when the SFA which collected the data is itself the sponsor of these enrolled sites. These data may not, however, be released to any other SFSP sponsor. Aggregate information which summarizes direct certification information may be released to any SFSP sponsor for the purpose of documenting the eligibility of open SFSP sites.

Whenever the SFA uses direct certification information to document the eligibility of enrolled SFSP sites which it sponsors, it should take every precaution to ensure that this information is controlled by limiting access to those who are normally involved in the eligibility determination process. We also recommend that, in the future, SFAs and State Agencies inform the public assistance offices from which the direct certification information was obtained that they plan to use this information to document the eligibility of enrolled sites which the SFA sponsors in the SFSP.

The only time it would be permissible for a sponsor other than the SFA which collected the data to use direct certification information to document the eligibility of an enrolled site is when the household itself has been given the direct certification information by the local Food Stamp or Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) office or when the SFA provided the household with a "notice of eligibility" based on direct certification procedures. In these instances, the household could submit the direct certification information just as it would otherwise submit information on household size and income or its food stamp or AFDC case numbers. Since the household would be submitting the information voluntarily, no issue of confidentiality would arise.
Use of Free and Reduced Price Applications Collected by SFAs

Essentially, the same limitations which apply to the use of direct certification information collected by SFAs also apply to the use of free and reduced price data by other SFSP sponsors. That is, aggregate free and reduced price data can be used by any type of sponsor in order to document the eligibility of open SFSP sites. Individual free and reduced price applications may only be used to document the eligibility of an enrolled SFSP site when the enrolled site is administered by the SFA which collected the applications. As is the case with direct certification information, the SFA should take every precaution to ensure that there is controlled access to the information on the free and reduced price applications.

Direct Certification by SFSP Sponsors other than Schools

Finally, it should be emphasized that this policy memorandum supplements, but does not supersede, our previous policy memorandum SFSP-112 dated January 28, 1991, in which direct certification was addressed. At that time, because the authority to use direct certification by schools during the school year had not yet been formally announced in a proposed rulemaking, we stated that P.L. 101-147 did not contemplate the use of direct certification by SFSP sponsors. This memorandum specifies the limited circumstances under which such school year direct certification information may be used by SFSP sponsors. However, the general rule that SFSP sponsors are not authorized to obtain and utilize direct certification information for the sole purpose of establishing SFSP site eligibility is still applicable.

If you have any questions, please contact my staff at (303) 844-0359.

Ann C. Hector
ANN C. HECTOR
Regional Director
Special Nutrition Programs