

# Confidentiality

Meal applications and the information contained within them are highly confidential.

## California Education Code Section 49558:

All applications and records concerning any individual made or kept by any public officer or agency in connection with the administration of any provision of this code relating to free or reduced-price meal eligibility shall be confidential, and may not be open to examination for any purpose not directly connected with the administration of any free or reduced-price meal program, or any investigation, prosecution, or criminal or civil proceeding conducted in connection with the administration of any free or reduced-price meal program.

Meal applications are to be used solely for determining free or reduced meal benefits. They are for the sole use of the Food Services Branch. They are voluntary; households and students cannot be coerced into filling out an application. It is a Federal violation to divulge or disclose any confidential information related to the application process or meal eligibility; penalties include fines up to \$1000 and imprisonment of up to a year.

## Do's

- Encourage parents to mail in their application directly to the Food Services Branch central office in order to maintain the strictest confidentiality.
- Direct students to the cafeteria when turning in an application.
- Minimize the number of people collecting applications at your school location.
- If you allow your office to accept applications:
  - Designate who can accept them and ensure they understand confidentiality.
  - Keep them in a closed envelope and designate a secure place to collect them.
  - Turn them in to the Cafeteria Manager at the end of each day.

## Do Not

- Allow non-district personnel to collect or handle applications.
- Allow individuals to look over information submitted on an application (other than Food Service employees)
- Hold applications for more than one day.
- Withhold benefit, privileges, access etc to a student unless they turn in an application
  - You cannot insist that a student turn in an application - it is voluntary and optional!
  - You may not withhold class schedules, lockers, etc from students based upon turning in a meal application – this is a violation of their civil rights!