# Superintendent’s Memo #029-19


**COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Department of Education**

DATE: January 25, 2019

TO: Division Superintendents

FROM: James F. Lane, Ed.D., Superintendent of Public Instruction

## SUBJECT: Meal applications and benefits for households impacted by the federal government partial shutdown

The Virginia Department of Education has received inquiries regarding a household’s ability to apply and qualify for free or reduced price meals during the federal government partial shutdown. Household income for federal employees, contractors, and vendors may be impacted during this time period. The income eligibility guidelines for free and reduced price school meals are based on annual income. Meal applications can be completed at any time during the school year and households with furloughed employees can apply for benefits during a furlough. School Food Authorities (SFAs) should manage the application process in a manner which reflects their unique circumstances. During the furlough period, these households may not have information on the duration of the furlough or its ultimate impact on household income. Therefore, it is reasonable for SFAs to remind households that free or reduced price eligibility is intended to reflect actual annual income.

While households can apply at any point during the school year for free or reduced price school meals, eligibility remains based on annual income. If a household meets the income eligibility guidelines because a household member is furloughed or income has been reduced due to contractors or vendors not receiving payments, and the household income meets the income eligibility guidelines, the household students would likely be eligible for free or reduced price meals. However, employees, contractors, and vendors that recoup their salary or payments and, therefore, the annual income exceeds the income eligibility guidelines, the household should contact the school division to notify them of a change in status. Once students are eligible for free or reduced price meals for the school year, their status remains the same for the remainder of the school year, unless they re-apply and no longer meet the criteria or are selected for verification and documentation is inadequate to support the free or reduced price meal eligibility. The distinction in this circumstance is that the funds, salary, or payments may be recovered, which is not the case for laid off or unemployed household members.

In addition, households should be made aware that if they are selected for verification later in the school year, they will be required to produce documentation of actual income for the application month. School divisions may choose to verify applications “for cause” if they have specific information indicating that the information on the application is not accurate.

Please contact your SNP Regional Specialist assigned to your school division or Dr. Sandy Curwood at sandra.curwood@doe.virginia.gov or by phone at (804) 225-2074 with any additional questions.

JFL/SCC/dbd