PUBLIC RELEASE

The ESC of Lake Erie West announced its 2026-2027 program year policy free and reduced price meals or free milk for students unable to pay the full price of meals or milk served under the National School Lunch and School Breakfast, After School Care Snack or Special Milk Programs. The Bridge Program of Lake Erie West has a copy of the policy, which may be reviewed by any interested party. The State of Ohio Budget for school year 2026-2027 includes funding to cover the cost of reduced meals for breakfast and lunch. This provision allows schools to provide no cost meals to reduced price meal eligible students.

The Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines will be used to determine eligibility. Children from families whose annual income is at or below the federal guidelines are eligible for free and reduced-price meals or free milk if the school participates in the Special Milk Program.

Application forms are distributed to all homes in a letter to parents or guardians. To apply for free and reduced-price benefits, households should complete an application and return it to the school. Additional copies are available at the principal's office in each school. A complete application is required. Households which currently receive Special Nutrition Assistance Program Benefits (SNAP, formally known as food stamps) or Ohio Works First (OWF) funds for a child must provide the child's name, the SNAP or OWF case number and signature of an adult household member on the application. Households that do not receive SNAP or OWF funds must provide the names of all household members, the last four digits of the Social Security Number of the adult signing the application or state "none" if the adult does not have a Social Security Number, the amount and source of income received by each household member (state the monthly income) and the signature of an adult household member. If any of this information is missing, the school cannot process the application.

FREE HEALTH CARE: Families with children eligible for school meals may be eligible for free health care coverage through Medicaid and/or Ohio's Healthy Start & Healthy Families programs. These programs include coverage for doctor visits, immunizations, physicals, prescriptions, dental, vision, mental health, substance abuse and more. Please call 1-800-324-8680 for more information or to request an application. Information can also be found on the web at

http://jfs.ohio.gov/ohp/consumers/familychild.stm. Anyone who has an Ohio Medicaid card is already receiving these services.

The information provided on the application is confidential and will only be used for the purpose of determining eligibility and may be verified at any time during the school year by school or other program official. To discourage the possibility of misrepresentation, the application forms contain a statement above the space for signature certifying that all information furnished is true and correct. Applications are being made in connection with the receipt of federal funds. Schools or other officials may check the information on the application at any time during the school year. Deliberate misrepresentation of information may subject the applicant to prosecution under applicable state and federal laws.

Households will be notified of the approval or denial of benefits.

Foster children are categorically eligible for free meal benefits regardless of the household's income. If a family has foster children living with them and wishes to apply for such meals or milk for them, contact

the school for more information. Under the provision of the policy, an appointed hearing official in each district will review applications and determine eligibility. If a parent or guardian disagrees with the decision on the application or the result of verification, the decision may be discussed with the determining official on an informal basis. If a formal appeal is desired, the household has the right to a fair hearing. A fair hearing can be requested either orally or in writing from an appointed fair hearing official in each district. Call your school district's office for this name and number.

The policy contains an outline of the hearing procedure.

Households may apply for benefits any time during the school year. If a household is not currently eligible and if the household size increases or income decreases because of unemployment or other reasons, the family should contact the school to file a new application. Such changes may make the children of the family eligible for free or reduced-price benefits if the family income falls at or below the levels shown above.

Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508- 0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or

fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or

email: program.intake@usda.gov

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