

Fee Waiver Information
For the 2006-2007 School Year

1. As a principal, what requirements do I now have to follow?

Answer: *You will have to sign that you have met all of the requirements in the “certificate of compliance” found in your packet. Please take the time to understand, and fulfill all of your responsibilities promptly the beginning of the school year.*

2. Must we provide income verification every year from parents requesting fee waivers?

Answer: *No. State law indicates that Utah school districts are only required to verify income one time during a student’s membership. The state form Grade 7 through 12 School Fees Notice states: “Fee waiver eligibility documentation is NOT required annually but may be required at any time by the school or parent may ask for review for good cause.*

Alpine School District has elected to verify income each year.

Carol Lear indicated districts may choose to verify income one time during a student’s membership but also may choose to verify income annually.

3. Do we need to keep a manual list of those who have been verified?

Answer: *We suggest that all schools use the fee waiver tracking program in the AS400. This allows all schools to coordinate their efforts. Also, East Shore High school may use the student fee waiver information from the feeder school. The AS400 has a tracking program and the ability to send denial letters.*

4. Are we required to have both the verification of income in the form of current pay stubs of income and the most recent tax forms for all students applying for a fee waiver?

Answer: *Check stubs give the most current information, and the tax return helps to verify that all income is included. Use gross income for current check stub information. If it appears from the tax return that all current information is not included, you should request the additional current check stub information or deny the waiver if you determine the applicant is submitting a fraudulent application. This process requires a judgment call. Use the most current information if it appears to be complete. Use gross income on the tax return for self employed applicants or if current information appears incomplete. Those who supply the documentation that they qualify for fee waiver based on SSI (Blind or Disabled student), Family received AFDC (may be on free lunch direct certification program), foster care or are on state custody have already met the income criteria for fee waivers and do not have to supply additional income verification data.*

The direct certification list comes to the school district on an Excel spread sheet from the State Food Stamp Office. The District uploads this information and is available on the AS400. We ask for the social security number on the fee waiver application to assist you to locate the student on the AS400.

- 5. Page 2 of 2 of the FEE WAIVER APPLICATION as posed on the Web of the State Office of Education states the following: “The last income tax return or the last three pay stubs, or both, if available, of each household member are required to be attached to this form.”**

**I see that this same form that went out in the District summer mailer states the following: “The last income tax return and the last three pay stubs of each household member are required to be attached to this form. See a school administrator if your tax return was not filed or you have no pay stubs
Why are our forms different?**

Answer: Carol Lear of the State Office of Education was not opposed to our changing the wording to require both the tax return and check stubs for Alpine School District, but felt that other Districts might not provide the training on how to work with those who did not file tax returns or due to unemployment do not have check stubs. Carol indicated that even though families may not have filed a tax return, they still have the right to have education for their families. An Administrator must take the information that is available to make the determination if the household would qualify.

- 6. Must all applicants complete the asset text?**

Answer: No. As a District we feel that use of the asset test is confusing, and as a practical matter difficult to administer. Per Carol Lear the intent of the asset test is to catch those parents thought to be cheating the system. It was never intended to be required for eligibility for each student.

The asset test was not included in the 2006 summer mailer to students for the 2006-7 year.

Carol Lear stated that the second paragraph of the school fee notice was written in a way to allow the principal to force the asset test in situations that they feel may be needed. It is at the discretion of the principal to determine which parents would need to provide the asset information. If the principal feels that parents are honestly filling out the form the asset test is not needed.

*A parent may want to complete an asset test to prove that, despite the family income, student(s) are eligible for fee waivers because of significant family debts or responsibilities. If a parent **wants** to reveal extensive and person family information through the asset test we suggest that the school consider the information/test submitted. The total value of assets held by all*

household members cannot exceed \$2,000. There is one exception to this limit: Households with one or more members age 60 or older or disabled members may have up to \$3,000 in assets.

7. What process do we use to deny a fee waiver and what table do I use to determine if an applicant is qualified for a fee waiver?

Answer: If the family's income is above the free lunch table amounts, use the appropriate denial forms provided by the State or generated by the AS400. Also, remember that the law requires documentation of fee waiver eligibility even if students are eligible for free school lunch. The documentation required to establish fee waiver eligibility must include verification based on the last income tax return and last three pay stubs.

*Make sure that you **do not use** the guidelines in the Free and Reduced Lunch Application that was given to the parents in the summer mailer. Those amounts in the application are for reduced lunch and fee waivers are only required to be given to those who qualify for free lunch. The free lunch table is now included in the fee waiver application.*

8. Where do I go to get answers to my fee waiver questions?

Answer: *Go directly to the following URL on the Internet:* <http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us/LAW/School%20Fee%20Forms.htm> there is additional information on the USOE homepage: click on "Programs," select "Law and Legislation," then go to "Papers of interest" for an extensive question and answer discussion of fee waivers.

9. How do I organize my staff to handle the impact of answering questions with this issue?

Answer: *Any verbal communications with parents regarding denials or other conflicts must be handled by a school administrator. Staff may assist with clerical functions. An administrator must be available during registration for problem resolution with applicants.*

10. What time line should we follow in the application process.

- **September 1.** *Send notice to those with incomplete applications stating that complete information is required by September 30 to qualify for fee waiver. Also provide on the notice that those who complete their applications after September 30 will be prorated forward only from the point when the application for fee waiver is complete.*
- **No later than January 1.** *Send notice to parents from TES that if they have not turned in their required information that they will go to collections of February 15. This notification may be done on the TES program.*
- **February 15.** **Send to collections any incomplete applications.**

Please use caution before you sign the C2 from our collection agency. If the student qualified for fee waiver but did not apply, the school runs the risk of having to pay the court costs and attorney fees. Lost book, fines, uniforms, yearbooks, those things that fall outside of the fee waiver area may still be turned over to a collection agency.

11. How do we handle a change of fee waiver status during the school year?

Answer: If the applicant has been approved based on income guidelines at the time of registration, (based on the free lunch table) fees are waived. If the status is changed and the applicant no longer qualifies for fee waiver, it will be necessary to charge families fees on a pro-rata basis from the date they no longer qualified.

If during the year the income of the applicant drops to level that now qualifies a student for a fee waiver, do not refund the full year but refund waived fees from the date they apply and qualify.

12. What are the schools responsibilities to protect the confidential fee waiver information?

Answer: School staff should receive instructions on keeping fee waiver student's information confidential. Student aids should not be allowed to help with the fee waiver process. School staff must not discriminate in any way against those on waivers. After the applicants have been approved the information must be destroyed. Do not destroy information until January 1, 2007. This time frame allows for follow up on any issues relating to conflicts of status between schools and issues related to reporting to the State Office of Education.

13. How should we handle "extenuating circumstances" for approving families who are just above the free lunch table amounts?

Answer: Caution should be used in approving any application that does not meet the income levels listed on the table amounts. It is difficult to justify anything other than this, and it is costly for the school. However, the principal may make the final decision to grant a partial waiver to an applicant who does not strictly qualify based on table amounts.

14. If I see from the AS400 that the student of a household qualified for fee waiver at the high school, may I assume that the younger household members in my junior high school would also qualify?

Answer: No. We have several situations where a single student of a household may qualify for fee waiver when other students in the same household would not. Always check the reason code for the approval. For example, the student on SSI (blind or disabled) may be the only student in the family that would qualify. The SSI income of this student must be included in household income, and may push the household income above the free lunch level to disqualify other students in the same household. Also, foster care students may live in a household where only the foster care student qualifies for waiver.

15. The old program “Aid to families with Dependent Children” AFDC is now simply referred to as public assistance. What types of public assistance qualify for fee waiver without income verification?

Answer: Only those on public assistance who receive financial assistance or food stamps qualify. Fee waivers are based on income levels associated with free lunch (approximately 130 % of the poverty level). The income of those on public assistance who receive financial assistance or food stamps are below the 130% level.

15. Why don't we grant fee waivers without income verification to other types of public assistance such as Medicaid, WIC or child care?

Answer: Medicaid has various programs that range from 50% of poverty level to 180%. WIC and Child care also has a wide range that exceeds 130% of poverty. Those who receive these types of assistance are required to provide income verification.

16. We have fee waiver students that refuse to participate in a group fund raiser, such as a car wash, where all students are participating. May we tell students they are required help to same extent that paying students are helping?

Answer: The State poster from the Utah State Office of education now states the following: If fee waivers are sought for activities where students are required to participate in fund-raisers, all students will be expected to participate in group fund-raisers to the same extent for fees to be waived.