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National School Lunch Participation in Utah

SALT LAKE CITY – Free school lunch participation increased by almost two million meals according to preliminary figures released by the Utah State Office of Education today. School lunch participation in Utah during the 2008-09 school year show paid meal participation, which is by far the largest category of meals sold to students in Utah, stayed relatively stable at 31,549,660 meals, but the free meals category of meals increased from 16,738,159 meals in 2007-08 to 18,713,829 meals in 2008-09.

The State Office sends out letters to parents participating in the Food Stamp or Family Employment Program yearly to directly certify their children to receive meals at no cost. In summer of 2008, the office sent out 29,000 letters. In summer of 2009, the Office sent out 42,000 letters. The increase represents the increased enrollment of families in Utah in the Food Stamp and Family Employment Programs.

Families will receive applications for free and reduced-price meal benefits in student enrollment packets or they can pick up an application form at the school their children attend. The applications should be returned to the school in which the child is enrolled. School authorities will evaluate the application and tell the parents if their children qualify for free meal benefits. “This might be a way to help parents who have lost jobs, and assure their children

receive a well-balanced meal during the school day” said Child Nutrition Programs director, Luann Shipley.

If parents have received a letter certifying their children for benefits, they should bring the letter to the school where their children are enrolled. School officials will make a copy of the letter and their children will be eligible to receive meals at no cost. Families who have misplaced the letter certifying their children for benefits can simply complete an application for benefits at the school where their children are enrolled. The application will be evaluated by the school officials and the parents will be notified of the status of the child’s eligibility. If the parents need to complete an application in a language other than English, applications in 25 languages are available from the school.

Along with the application for free or reduced price benefits, parents will receive a letter telling them how to complete the application. The application must be completed correctly in order for school officials to evaluate the child’s eligibility for meals. If parents have questions regarding how to complete the application, they should contact the school where their child is enrolled using the toll-free telephone number included with the instructions for filling out the application.

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