

Scanned Images of Multi-Child Applications for Meal Benefits Sent to State Agency for Off-Site Review

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In 2001, USDA ruled that scanned images of applications for meal benefits are 'original documents' thus opening the door to off-site review by state agency staff. This technology provided an opportunity to electronically sort, store and submit images of multi-child applications to the state agency in a paperless format. The scanned image was successfully tested during the January 2002 Coordinated Review Effort (CRE) by state agency staff on applications scanned and processed in the district. Louisiana's Division of Nutrition Assistance (DNA) staff reviewed the images of multi-child applications for 12 schools (4,677 students) from the state office.

In an effort to streamline application processing, the East Baton Rouge Parish Child Nutrition Program (EBR) pioneered the scanning and processing of applications in 1997. The district processes approximately 26,000 applications using a scanning procedure that captures both the image and the text, determines the eligibility for meal benefits, prints letters, and notifies the schools using the WAN. Prior to electronic imaging, the EBR staff spent about 360 labor hours preparing hard copies of application forms for state review by manually sorting the forms by school. The cost of manually sorting was approximately \$2,880. After the review, the hard copies were returned to their original batch -- a laborious task that took approximately 180 labor hours, costing about \$1,440.

The scanning and processing of applications drastically reduced the manpower and labor hours needed to prepare for a review. Electronically sorting of images by school, printing hard copies of each Master List, and copying the 12 school files to a compact disk, was done in four hours by two district employees for a minimal cost of \$ 64.00. Louisiana's DNA staff of eight reviewed the images of multi-child applications for 4,677 students in the state office thus avoiding travel time and expense. Off-site reviewing of electronic images of applications proved to be a highly efficient and cost-effective for the district and the state agency.