MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: NEW PAYMENT AND APPLICATION SYSTEM FOR THE NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH, SCHOOL BREAKFAST, SPECIAL MILK, AND AFTERSCHOOL SNACK PROGRAMS

TO: Superintendents
    Business Managers
    Food Service Directors

FROM: Pat Birkenshaw, Chief
      Division of Food and Nutrition

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Food and Nutrition, has contracted with Colyar Consulting Group, Inc. (CCG) to migrate our Child Nutrition Program mainframe databases to a PC-based, Internet accessible system. The system is referred to as “paperless;” the objective is to eliminate the need for paper or hard copy annual applications and monthly claims for reimbursement. We anticipate that the system will be operable during October or November of 2000.

The official name of the new system is CN PEARs (Child Nutrition Program Electronic Application and Reimbursement System). We anticipate that the user-friendly name of the system will simply be PEARs.

What benefits will the new system provide for you, the Child Nutrition Program sponsor?

- You will be able to submit your annual application, monthly claim for reimbursement, and other required reports to the Division of Food and Nutrition via the Internet.
- You will be able to amend your application, change your Schedule A, and submit adjusted claims for reimbursement, ETC. via the Internet.
- You will receive approval or additional instructions concerning your submissions from Division of Food and Nutrition staff via the Internet.
As a Child Nutrition Program sponsor, **PEARS** will also provide:

- **Opportunities to improve efficiency based on the elimination of several paper forms submitted through the U.S. mail.** The paperwork burden will be significantly reduced.

- **Opportunities to improve effectiveness based on the edit checks built into the new software.** For example, error messages will appear on the computer screen if data entered by the sponsor exceeds tolerances. The sponsor will then be able to correct the data entry error, online, prior to submitting the electronic claim to the Division of Food and Nutrition.

- **Opportunities to receive timely payments based on the immediate identification of errors, due to the edit checks system, on all paperwork submitted electronically to the Division of Food and Nutrition.** Payments will not be delayed due to paper forms being returned to the sponsor for correction.

- **Opportunities to improve food service management practices.** Once Child Nutrition Program sponsors utilize the **PEARS** system, new methods for managing food service information will become apparent. For example, sponsors who are not currently utilizing PC technology will gain the confidence to use the PC for ordering; developing menus, standardized recipes, and production records; organizing and controlling inventory; and much more.

**We anticipate the following questions from Child Nutrition Program sponsors:**

- **Will the PDE provide user training for sponsors that will enable them to use the **PEARS** system correctly?**

  Yes. Our contractor, CCG, will provide training for two people from each School Food Authority (SFA). Staff attending training must be the personnel responsible for submitting Child Nutrition Program forms to the PDE, via the Internet. Staff must also have familiarity with a PC and some experience with an Internet browser.

- **Will SFAs/sponsors be required to use the **PEARS** system?**

  Yes. Based on preliminary feedback, we anticipate that many sponsors will choose to eliminate paperwork and begin using the system during October or November of 2000. Sponsors may continue to submit paper forms until the end of School Year 2000-2001. **However, all sponsors, public and private, are required to use the system at the beginning of the 2001-2002 School Year.**

It is important to note that our contractor, CCG, will only provide training for National School Lunch, School Breakfast, Special Milk, and AfterSchool Snack Program sponsors during School Year 2000-2001. Therefore, it would be prudent for all sponsors to include school food services in their technology budgets and planning documents now.
Will technical assistance, such as a “help-line,” be available to sponsors if efforts to transmit the forms, over the Internet, fail?

Yes, our contractor will operate a help desk with an 800 telephone number.

What are the minimum hardware and software requirements for accessing the PEARs system?

**Hardware:**
- Pentium II 350 MHz processor
- 4.2 GB HD
- 32 MB RAM
- CD-ROM
- 15” monitor (Supports 600 x 800 resolution)
- Internet access: ISDN or greater preferred. 56K modem minimally acceptable.

**Software:**
- Windows 95 or 98
- Microsoft Internet Explorer, version 4.0 or 5.0 or, Netscape Communicator, version 4.0

Will the PEARs system be tested prior to October or November of 2000?

Yes. Approximately 10 public and private sponsors of the National School Lunch Program will become pilot sites.

If a public or private school also sponsors the Summer Food Service Program and/or the Child and Adult Care Food Program, will the sponsor submit applications and claims for reimbursement for these Programs over the Internet, too?

Yes. However, the migration of the Child Nutrition Programs from a mainframe system to a PC-based system will be done in phases. We anticipate that the Summer Food Service Program will be added to the PEARs system during the Spring of 2001. The Child and Adult Care Food Program will be added during the Fall of 2001.

Will training be provided for sponsors of these programs?

Yes, CCG will provide user training for Summer Food Service Program and/or Child and Adult Care Food Program sponsors addressing the use of the PEARs system. Training will be available after each program successfully completes the pilot stage.

If you have additional questions, please contact Eileen Hileman or me at 1-800-331-0129.

Thank you.