



Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Charge Policy Requirement

SNA 2018

OSDE PRESENTATION



United States Department of Agriculture



Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge

Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools

USDA-FNS

9/16/2016

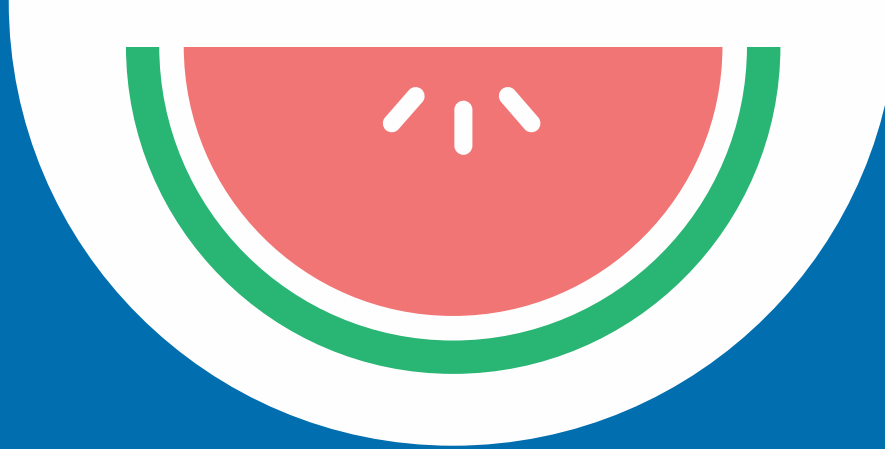




Today's Agenda



- Introduction
- Local Charge Policy Requirement
- Policy Communication Requirement
- Best Practices
- Resources
- Questions

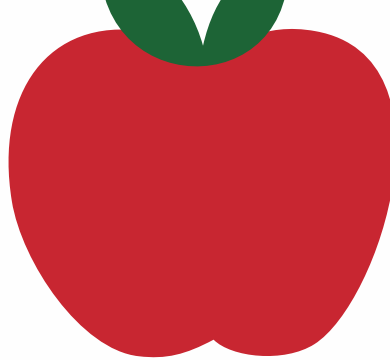


Introduction



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Single Sign on/ e-Claims Other Documents

<https://cnp.sde.ok.gov/eClaims/OtherDocs.aspx>

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Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010

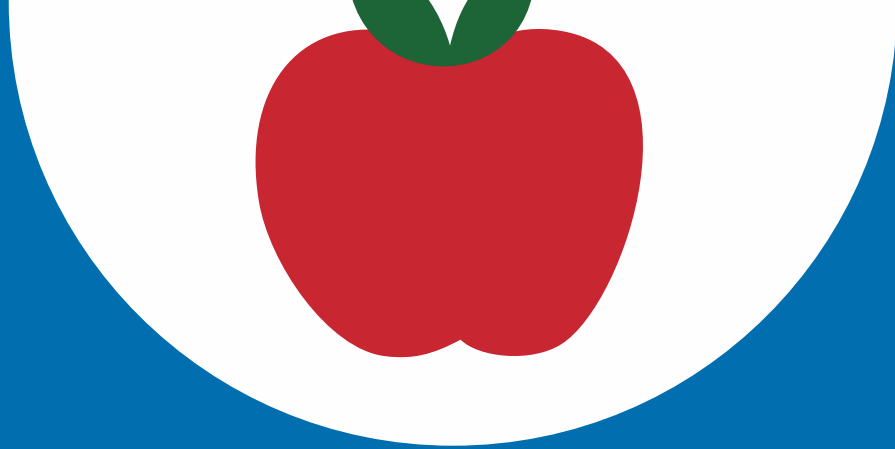
- Required USDA to examine and report to Congress on current charge and alternate meal policies and practices
- Final report submitted to Congress in July 2016



Special Nutrition Program Operations Study School Year 2011-2012



- 58% of SFAs incurred unpaid meal costs during SY 2010-2011
- Only 35% of States had a policy or standard practice regarding the service of meals to students without funds to pay for their meal



Local Charge Policy Requirement

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What is the Requirement?

- All SFAs operating the NSLP and/or SBP **must** develop a meal charge policy
- Should have been in place by July 1, 2017*
- Local discretion

**SY 2017-2018*



Level of Policy Development

OPTIONS:

- State-level policy implemented by all SFAs
- Combination State/SFA-level policy
- SFA-level policy



Key Policy Considerations

- Maintain the **financial integrity** of the Programs
- Provide children with **adequate nutrition** to focus in school
- Minimize **stigmatization** children with meal charges





Preventing Student Distress

Discouraged Actions	Encouraged Actions
Announcing or publicizing the names of children with unpaid meal charges	Communicating privately with families about a child's outstanding balance
Using hand stamps, stickers, or other physical markers to identify children with unpaid meal charges	Communicating payment reminders directly and discreetly to adults in the household
Sending clearly marked notices home when children have an outstanding balance	Sending discrete reminders in a plain, white envelope
Throwing a child's meal in the trash if they are unable to pay	Serving children the regular reimbursable meal while working with the family to obtain payment

Stakeholder Involvement

- School administrators
- School board members
- School food service professionals
- Social workers
- Families



Alternate Meals



Policy Recommendations: Alternate Meals

If alternate meals are offered, SFAs should explain:

- The meal service(s) that offer alternate meals
- The duration of the provision of alternate meals
- If applicable, the cost of the alternate(s)
- How alternate meals are presented



Alternate Meal Requirements



- **Reimbursable** alternate meals must:
 - Meet meal pattern requirements
 - Meet Paid Lunch Equity requirements, when served to students eligible for “paid” meals
- **Non-reimbursable** alternate meals must:
 - Be paid for using non-Federal funds
 - Meet Smart Snacks and non-program food requirements, if students are charged for the meal

Alternate Meal Policy Considerations for SFAs Opting to Provide Alternate Meals

SFAs are not required to provide alternate meals to children with unpaid meal charges. As provided in [SP 46-2016](#), SFAs opting to provide alternate meals should include information about alternate meals in their local meal charge policy.

For each entity or grade level that has a different alternate meal policy, FNS encourages SFAs to explain in the policy:

1. Which meal service(s) offer alternate meals?	<input type="checkbox"/> Breakfast <input type="checkbox"/> Lunch <input type="checkbox"/> Afterschool Snacks
2. How long will alternate meals be provided?	Duration of the provision of alternate meals: _____
3. Are students required to pay for alternate meals?	<div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No </div> <div> <i>If students must pay for the alternate, what is the cost? (Include all meals that apply.)</i> • Breakfast: \$ _____ • Lunch: \$ _____ • Afterschool Snacks: \$ _____ </div> </div>
4. When are alternate meals offered?	<i>Explain when meals are provided (i.e., immediately in lieu of charging, or after a child's negative balance dips to a certain level):</i> _____ _____ _____ _____
5. How are alternate meals presented?	<i>Explain how alternate meals are presented (i.e., a sack lunch or a low-cost reimbursable entrée regularly included on the menu):</i> _____ _____ _____ _____

Policy Recommendations: Debt Collections

- Focus on adults responsible for providing funds
- Consider costs vs. benefits of debt collection efforts





Policy Communications



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Policy Communications: Families

- SFAs **must** communicate the policy, **in writing**, to:
 - All families at the start of the school year
 - Families with students who transfer in to the SFA mid-year



Additional Communication Strategies

- “Back-to-School” packets
- School or district websites but must still be distributed in writing
- Student handbooks
- Written notices



Policy Communications: SFA Staff



- SFAs **must** communicate policy, in writing, to staff members responsible for:
 - Collecting payment
 - Notifying families of low/negative balances
 - Enforcing the policy

Recordkeeping

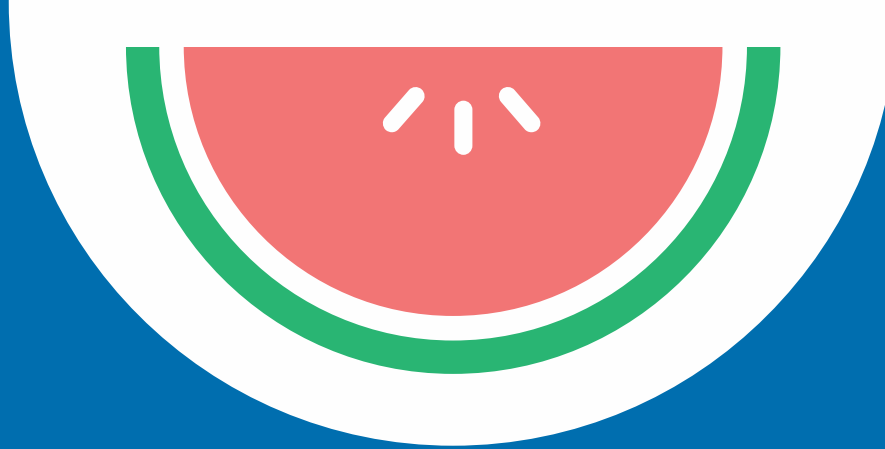
- SFAs **must** provide policies to the State agency during the Administrative Review
- SFAs **must** maintain documentation of policy communication methods



Policy Updates



*SFAs are encouraged to **review** and **revise** the policy regularly.*



Best Practices



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Community Eligibility Provision

- Allows eligible schools to offer school meals at no charge to all students
- Saves time and money by streamlining paperwork and administrative requirements
- Deadline to elect CEP for the upcoming school year:
June 30



Application Outreach

- Summer Outreach
- School Year Outreach
- Community Outreach



Changes in Household Circumstances



*Families may apply (or reapply) for free or reduced price meals at **any time** during the school year.*

Transfer Students

- Schools are encouraged to accept transfer student's previous eligibility determinations
- Schools are not liable for the accuracy of the previous determination



SP 51-2016: Ensuring Year-long Eligibility in the School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs



Language Assistance

- **Identify the Language:** Share USDA's "I Speak" document with parents/guardians
- **Provide Translations:** 49 translations are currently available on the FNS Translated Applications webpage
- **Develop Partnerships:** Partner with community organizations to deliver accurate, cost-effective language services

SP 37-2016: Meaningful Access for Persons with Limited English Proficiency in the School Meal Programs: Guidance and Q&As

Payment Options



- Provide on-line payment systems
- Encourage families to track spending
- Allow automatic deductions when balances are low
- Provide repayment plans

Payment Reminders

- Email
- Telephone
- Automated
- In-person
- With other reminders



Sample Materials

*Found in the Appendix of
“Overcoming the Unpaid
Meal Challenge: Proven
Strategies from Our
Nation’s Schools”*

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/unpaid-meal-charges>

Sample Outstanding Balance Letter

[PARENT/GUARDIAN NAME(S)]

[ADDRESS]

[CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE]

[MM/DD/YEAR]

Dear [NAME(S)],

The goal of [NAME OF SCHOOL'S] breakfast and lunch program is to provide healthy meals to children during the school day. In order to serve healthy, high-quality meals to all children, we must make sure we are financially secure. You play a key role in this effort, and are responsible for purchases made by your child in our school cafeteria.

As of [DATE], your child has a negative balance of \$[X.XX]. We strongly encourage you to pay this amount as soon as possible. Your response to this request is important. Paying back a debt shows your personal responsibility. It also keeps our food service program strong and ensures all children at our school have access to the healthy food they need to focus in the classroom.

To review [NAME OF SCHOOL'S] Meal Charge Policy, and the penalties for failing to pay back your child's negative balance, please visit [include web address here, or include a copy of the Unpaid Meal Charge Policy in the letter]. We understand that mistakes happen. But meal payments are important to our program, and we must collect your cafeteria debt.

Please contact [NAME OF SCHOOL OFFICIAL] if you have questions. If you think your child may qualify for free or reduced price school meals, please see the next page.

Thank you for your quick payment.

Sincerely,

[NAME], [TITLE]

CC: [NAME OF TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, SUPERINTENDENT, ETC. AS APPROPRIATE]

INCLUDE
PHOTO OF
SCHOOL
OFFICIAL
WRITING THE
LETTER



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Discretionary Elimination of Reduced Price Charges

- At the discretion of SFAs, schools may serve meals at no cost children eligible for reduced price meals
- Expenditures associated with covering student payments may be funded from the nonprofit food service account



SP 17-2014: Discretionary Elimination of Reduced Price Charges in the School Meal Programs

Charitable Funding Sources

- Community funding
- “Random Acts of Kindness” funding
- School fundraisers
- End of year donations
- Unpaid meal charges may not be absorbed by the Food Service account,
- Must use non-federal funds to cover unpaid meal charges



Charitable Funding Sources

- SFAs could develop a distribution plan for charitable funding sources
- School food service professionals should never be expected to:
 - Solicit funds
 - Pay for children's meals





Unpaid Meal Charges Website

Policy Guidance:

- SP 46-2016: Local Meal Charge Policies
- SP 47-2016: Clarification on Delinquent Meal Payments
- SP 57-2016: Guidance and Q&A

Best Practices:

- GUIDE: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools
- WEBINAR: The Challenge of Unpaid Meals: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools

Find these resources and more at:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/unpaid-meal-charges>

<http://www.fns.usda.gov>



Thank You!

**Oklahoma State
Department of Education
Child Nutrition Programs
405-521-3327**



United States Department of Agriculture

