

Checklist for Reviewing the Local Educational Agency's Unpaid Meal Charge Policy and Procedures for the School Nutrition Programs

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) regulations for the National School Lunch program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) and Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-215 (b) and (c) (Amended 2021) require local educational agencies (LEAs) to institute and clearly communicate a policy for unpaid meal charges in the [school nutrition programs](#). LEAs should use the checklist below to determine if their unpaid meal charge policy and associated procedures comply with the federal and state requirements.

Language to Include in District Policy

- A prohibition on publicly identifying or shaming a child.
- A statement to indicate that charging adult meals and a la carte foods and beverages is not allowed.
- A declaration of the right for any child to obtain a meal, which may exclude a la carte items.
- A procedure for communicating with the parent or legal guardian for the purpose of collecting unpaid meal charges.
- A procedure to refer the parent or guardian to the LEA's McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Education Liaison when unpaid meal charges reach 30 meals.
- A statement that by June 30 of each year, the unpaid meal debt must be reimbursed by board of education funds and not the nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA).

Items to Include in Household Communication

- A free or reduced-price meal application including information regarding SNAP, such as the Connecticut State Department of Education's [Addendum C: Information on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#).
- The contact information for local food pantries.
- A link to the town's website listing community services available to residents of the town.

Items to Include in Internal Procedures

- An internal procedure to communicate and train district staff on the policy.
- An internal procedure that school food authorities (SFAs) must ensure the policy is provided in writing to all families at the start of each school year and to families transferring to the school during the school year.

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Prohibited Language

- Language that refers to an alternate or emergency meal.
- Language that references the household's financial hardship.
- Language that limits the total number of meals students can charge. Note: The policy may include a limit of one breakfast meal and one lunch meal per day but cannot cap the total number of meals charged.
- Language indicating that meals cannot be charged.
- Language indicating student meal debt rolls over into the next school year.
- Language indicating that the district accepts free and reduced-priced meal applications when all schools in the district participate in CEP.
- Language that states, "although not required by law." This language is inaccurate since this policy is based on Connecticut General Statute Section 10-215(b) and (c), which is a law enacted by a legislative body.
- Language indicating that meal debt will be communicated to the parent/guardian through the student.

Resources

Addendum C: Information on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) ("Addenda" section of CSDE's Eligibility for Free and Reduced-price Meals and Free Milk in School Nutrition Programs webpage):

<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/eligibility-for-free-and-reduced-price-meals-and-free-milk-in-school-nutrition-programs/application-forms#Addenda>

Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-215 (Amended 2021):

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsfp/cgs_10_215_amended_2021.pdf

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 11-22: Connecticut Statutory Requirements for Unpaid Meal Charges in Public Schools:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsfp/memos/om2022/om11-22.pdf>

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 4-17: Guidance on Unpaid Meal Charges and Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments:

<https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nsfp/memos/om2017/om04-17.pdf>

Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools (USDA):

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/cn/SP29-2017a2.pdf>

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Unpaid Meal Charges (CSDE's Financial Management for School Nutrition Programs webpage):
<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/nutrition/financial-management-for-school-nutrition-programs/unpaid-meal-charges>

Unpaid Meal Charges (USDA webpage):
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/unpaid-meal-charges>

USDA Memo SP 23-2017: Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q & A:
<https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/cn/unpaid-meal-charges-guidance-qas>

USDA Memo SP 29-2017: 2017 Edition: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/2017-edition-overcoming-unpaid-meal-challenge-proven-strategies-our-nations-schools>

USDA Memo SP 46-2016: Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/unpaid-meal-charges-local-meal-charge-policies>

USDA Memo SP 47-2016: Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payment:
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/unpaid-meal-charges-clarification-collection-delinquent-meal-payments>

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For more information, visit the “[Unpaid Meal Charges](#)” section of the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) [Financial Management for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage or contact the [school nutrition programs staff](#) at the Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 504, Hartford, CT 06103-1841. This document is available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/sde/nutrition/nslp/financialmanagement/unpaid_meal_charge_policy_checklist.pdf.

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
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