



State of Arizona
Department of Education
Office of Diane M. Douglas
Superintendent of Public Instruction

HNS 14-2017

MEMORANDUM

To: Local Educational Agencies participating in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program

From: Melissa Conner, Associate Superintendent
Arizona Department of Education, Health & Nutrition Services Division

Original Signed

Date: June 28, 2017

RE: Unpaid Meal Charge Policy Guidelines for School Year 2017-2018

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide guidelines and restrictions for the written meal charge policy that Local Education Agencies are to have in place beginning in school year 2017-2018. Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) memo SP 29-2017 and the accompanying guidance manual “Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge” states that “no later than July 1, 2017, all school food authorities (SFAs) operating the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) must have a written unpaid meal charge policy. The policy must be communicated to all families with children within the SFA and all school or district-level staff members responsible for policy enforcement”.

This guidance has been developed in order to ensure that all students and parents are treated in a respectful manner, regardless of their economic circumstance. The following list provides State specific restrictions that SFAs in Arizona must adhere to when developing and implementing their SFA-level written meal charge policy. Compliance with these restrictions as well as all other USDA requirements related to the meal charge policy and collection of delinquent debts will be monitored as part of the Administrative Review process of the NSLP and SBP.

Actions not allowed to be implemented or included in the written policy	Encouraged alternative actions
Announcing or publicizing the names of children with unpaid meal charges	Communicating privately with individual families about their child's outstanding balance
Requiring children with unpaid meal charges to use a different serving line to pick up an alternate meal	Serving children with unpaid meal charges the regular reimbursable meal (or a low-cost, reimbursable alternate meal) in the same serving line
Using hand stamps, stickers, or other physical markers to identify children with meal charge debt	Communicating payment reminders directly to adults in the family over the phone or via email
Sending clearly marked notices home with children who have an outstanding balance	Sending discrete reminders in a plain, white envelope, or sending reminders with other communication materials sent to all families
Enlisting volunteers, especially the parents or guardians of other students, to request payment from a family with unpaid meal charges	REQUIRED: Allowing only appropriate officials trained on USDA's confidentiality requirements who have a need to access a child's account balance or eligibility information to request payment from families with unpaid meal charges unless the family gives approval
Suggesting or requiring children with unpaid meal charges to work for a meal or to pay back their debt	Working with families to develop a payment plan to pay back meal charge debt
Throwing a child's meal in the trash if they are unable to pay	Serving children who are unable to pay the regular reimbursable meal or discreetly providing a low-cost, reimbursable alternate meal
Serving unappealing alternate meals as a strategy to embarrass children with unpaid meal debt	Ensuring the alternate meal (if opting to provide one) is a healthy meal and does not single out children with unpaid meal charges

Please refer to other FNS policy memoranda related to unpaid meal charges, which include the following and can be found at: <http://www.azed.gov/health-nutrition/memorandum/>

- SP 46-2016: *Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies*, July 8, 2016,
- SP 47-2016: *Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments*, July 8, 2016,
- SP 23-2017: *Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&As*, March 23, 2017,
- SP 29-2017: *Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools*, May 10, 2017.

FNS has also developed additional resources SFAs can use in their effort to address the challenge of unpaid meal charges. These resources are available on the FNS Unpaid Meal Charges website (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/unpaid-meal-charges>) and include:

- A guide summarizing FNS policy guidance and best practices from State agencies, schools, and other key stakeholders;
- Webinars sharing ideas and strategies to address unpaid meal charges; and
- Other relevant policy memoranda and guidance documents developed by FNS.

For questions regarding this memo, please contact your School Nutrition Programs Specialist whose contact information is located on the NSLP CNPWeb home page or send an email to ADESchoolNutrition@azed.gov.

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