

Local Meal Charge Policy Considerations for All SFAs

As provided in [SP 46-2016](#), no later than July 1, 2017, all SFAs operating the Federal school meal programs are required to have a written meal charge policy. An SFA may have a consistent policy for all students in the school district or choose to apply the policy differently based on student grade level.

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

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<p>1. Are students unable to pay for their meal at the time of the meal service allowed to charge a meal?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<p><i>If yes, which meals may be charged?</i></p> <input type="checkbox"/> Breakfast <input type="checkbox"/> Lunch <input type="checkbox"/> Afterschool Snacks
<hr/>		
<p>2. If students are allowed to charge a meal, is there a limit to the number of charges or dollar limit allowed before requiring payment of the debt?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	<p><i>If yes, what is the number or dollar amount for the charge limit(s)?</i></p> <p>_____</p>
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<p>3. If students are allowed to a charge meal, will they receive reimbursable or alternate meals?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Reimbursable <input type="checkbox"/> Alternate <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	<p><i>If students will receive an alternate meal, what will the meal contain? (Include all meals that apply.)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Breakfast:</i> _____ _____ • <i>Lunch:</i> _____ _____ • <i>Afterschool Snacks:</i> _____ _____
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<p>4. If students are allowed to charge a meal, will they have limitations on the foods they may select for a reimbursable meal?</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A	<p><i>If yes, what are the limitations?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

<p>5. Where can families find assistance with applying for free or reduced price school meals?</p>	<p><i>Information for families:</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Contact information for an SFA or school official:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Name:</i> _____ • <i>Phone:</i> _____
<p>6. How will the SFA notify households of low or negative balances?</p>	<p><i>Low balance notification policy:</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p><i>Negative balance notification policy:</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>7. What resources are available to assist families with paying for their children’s meals or debt?</p>	<p><i>List of resources for families (i.e., repayment plans):</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>8. How will delinquent meal charges be managed by the SFA?</p>	<p><i>Delinquent charges management policy:</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p>9. Which office or personnel will be responsible for managing the charges?</p>	<p><i>Contact information for SFA or school official:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Name/Office:</i> _____ • <i>Phone:</i> _____
<p>10. What are the consequences for families that fail to repay a debt?</p>	<p><i>Consequences for families:</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

Local Meal Charge Policy Communication Requirements for All SFAs

As provided in [SP 46-2016](#), no later than July 1, 2017, all SFAs operating the Federal school meal programs are required to have in place a written meal charge policy, and to communicate that policy to families and school and/or district-level staff members, as appropriate.

On an annual basis, SFAs should ensure the policy is communicated as required, and may use the following questions as a guide:

1. Have all families received a written copy of the meal charge policy?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		<i>Describe how the policy is communicated:</i> _____ _____
2. Have all families of transfer students received a written copy of the meal charge policy?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		<i>Describe how the policy is communicated:</i> _____ _____
3. Have all school and/or district-level staff members responsible for policy enforcement received a written copy of the meal charge policy?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		<i>Describe how the policy is communicated to staff members (i.e., during annual training) and which staff members are included:</i> _____ _____ _____
4. Is there a system in place to notify families of the meal charge policy when sending the initial notification of delinquent debt?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		<i>Describe how families are reminded of the policy when the notification is sent:</i> _____ _____ _____
5. Do schools share information about the policy in other communications with families?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		<i>Explain any other ways families are informed of the policy (i.e., student handbooks and/or in online portals households use to access student accounts):</i> _____ _____ _____

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?	<i>Duration of the provision of alternate meals:</i> _____
3. Are students required to pay for alternate meals?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
	<i>If students must pay for the alternate, what is the cost? (Include all meals that apply.)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfast: \$ _____ • Lunch: \$ _____ • Afterschool Snacks: \$ _____
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> _____ _____ _____ _____

Recommended Topics for Delinquent/Bad Debt Policies for SFAs

As provided in [SP 46-2016](#), no later than July 1, 2017, all SFAs operating the Federal school meal programs are required to have in place a written meal charge policy. Within that required policy, FNS recommends SFAs explain the collection methods the SFA will use and the conditions under which each will be initiated.

Specific topics recommended by FNS include the following:

1. How many days will a household's debt be delinquent before the SFA requests payment?

Number of Days: _____

2. What procedures are in place for determining if children with delinquent meal charges are eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits?

Provide examples (i.e., encouraging the child's household to submit an application):

3. How will households be notified of unpaid meal charges, expected payment dates, and collection efforts?

Describe household notification strategies:

4. How will repayment plans, with payment levels and due dates appropriate to a household's particular circumstances, be established?

Describe establishment of repayment plans, including any key considerations (i.e., a job loss in the household):

5. Will children with a small number of charges, in terms of dollars, be permitted to accumulate a larger debt before the SFA pursues recovery?

Yes

No

If so, what is the threshold?

6. What efforts will be made to collect household debt?

Describe debt collection efforts:

<p>7. Who will initiate household debt collection procedures?</p>	<p><i>Explain who is responsible for initiating collection procedures (e.g., food service manager, school principal, superintendent's office, etc.):</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>		
<p>8. Who will determine whether the achievement of program purposes would be jeopardized by the diversions of staff time and effort to collect payment?</p>	<p><i>Explain who is responsible for assessing debt collection efforts (e.g., food service manager, school principal, superintendent's office, etc.):</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>		
<p>9. Is there a cumulative dollar threshold beyond which the SFA will escalate the collection method?</p>	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%; vertical-align: top;"> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> <p><i>If so, what is the threshold?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> </td> </tr> </table>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<p><i>If so, what is the threshold?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<p><i>If so, what is the threshold?</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>		
<p>10. How will funds be obtained to restore the unallowable bad debt to the NSFSA?</p>	<p><i>Explain from where funds to restore the NSFSA will be obtained:</i></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>		

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**

HOW TO MAKE A PAYMENT TO [NAME OF SCHOOL'S] CAFETERIA:

[Include only those options available at the school]

[NAME OF SCHOOL] has many simple payment options for you to choose from. No matter which payment option you choose, **please remember that the current negative balance must be paid as soon as possible.**

- **Pay Online:** Make an online payment to your child's account using your credit or debit card at [WEB ADDRESS]. *[Make note of any fees associated with online payment and add any log-in instructions, as necessary.]*
- **Pay in the Mail:** Send a check to [SCHOOL ADDRESS]. Checks should be made payable to [NAME/OFFICE]. Please include your child's name and student ID number when sending a payment. *[IF POSSIBLE, ADD: "For your convenience, we have enclosed an envelope you may use to make your payment."]*
- **Pay in Person:** Stop by [LOCATION] between [AM HOUR] and [PM HOUR] Monday through Friday to pay by cash or a check. You may also send cash or a check to school with your child. Checks should be made payable to [NAME/OFFICE].

After paying back your debt, we encourage you to create a "safety net" for your child. Pre-paying for your child's meals is a simpler way of managing their account, and prevents unpaid meal charges. Paying for meals before the meal service also helps lunch lines move more quickly, giving children more time to enjoy their meal.

If your family is experiencing a financial setback, please contact us so we can help. We are willing to work with you to develop a payment plan for your debt. We can also assist you in applying for free or reduced price meal benefits.

HOW TO APPLY FOR FREE OR REDUCED PRICE MEALS:

If you think your child may be eligible for free or reduced price meals, please submit a school meal application. You may do this at any time during the school year. Applications are available at [SCHOOL OFFICE] between [AM HOUR] and [PM HOUR] Monday through Friday. *[IF POSSIBLE, ADD: "Applications are also available any time at WEB ADDRESS."]*

You must submit an application each year to be considered for free or reduced price meals. Even if your child received free or reduced price meals last year, you must submit a new application this year.

It is important to us that all eligible children receive free or reduced price school meals. We are happy to help you complete the application. If you have any questions or need help, please contact [NAME] at [PHONE NUMBER].

Sample Robo-Call Scripts

Sample Robo Call: Low Balance

Hello, this is [NAME]. I am the [POSITION/TITLE] at [NAME OF SCHOOL]. I am calling to let you know that [NAME OF STUDENT] has a low balance of [\$XX.XX] in their school meal payment account. To ensure your child has enough money to purchase school meals, please add funds to their account as soon as possible. You may do so by [ADD OPTIONS].

If you have questions, please call [OFFICE] at [XXX-XXX-XXXX].

If you wish to hear this message again, please press [KEY] now.

Thank you.

Sample Robo Call: Outstanding Balance

Hello, this is [NAME]. I am the [POSITION/TITLE] at [NAME OF SCHOOL]. I am calling to let you know that [NAME OF STUDENT] has a negative balance of [\$XX.XX] in their school meal payment account. In order to continue to serve nutritious, high-quality meals to all of our students, we must collect your child's debt. Please add funds to your child's account as soon as possible. You may do so by [ADD OPTIONS].

If you have questions or think your child may qualify for free or reduced price school meals, please call [OFFICE] at [XXX-XXX-XXXX].

If you wish to hear this message again, please press [KEY] now.

Thank you.

Sample Robo Call: Outstanding Balance, Follow-Up

Hello, this is [NAME]. I am the [POSITION/TITLE] at [NAME OF SCHOOL]. I am calling a second time to inform you that [NAME OF STUDENT] has a negative balance of [\$XX.XX] in their school meal payment account. Please add funds to your child's account as soon as possible. You may do so by [ADD OPTIONS]. [NAME OF SCHOOL] has an Unpaid Meal Charge Policy, which you can find [ON OUR WEBSITE, IN HANDBOOK, ETC.]. If you do not pay back your child's meal charge by [DATE], [STATE CONSEQUENCES].

If you have questions or think your child may qualify for free or reduced price school meals, please call [OFFICE] at [XXX-XXX-XXXX].

If you wish to hear this message again, please press [KEY] now.

Thank you.