

Commissioner's Memo
8/20/2019

SY2019-2020 Unpaid Meal Charges

Memo Information

Memo Number **CNU-20-006**

Memo Date 8/20/2019

Memo Type Regulatory

Unit Child Nutrition

Regulatory Authority Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights Act 428 of 2019, USDA School Policy Memos SP 46-2016, SP 47 2016 and SP29-2017

Response Required NO

Attention Superintendents; Principals; General Business Managers; Child Nutrition Directors/Managers

Primary Contact Information

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Memo Text

School meal programs aim to provide nutritious meals to children during the school day. Children may receive breakfast and lunch at no cost if they are categorically eligible for free meals, or if they qualify for free meals based on Federal poverty guidelines. Children who do not qualify for free meals may purchase meals at a subsidized cost, at either the reduced price or paid rate. Sometimes, however, children who do not qualify for free meals would like a breakfast or lunch, but do not have money in their account or in hand to cover the cost of the meal at the time of the meal service.

The Hunger-Free Student's Bill of Rights Act 428 of 2019 requires schools to provide a student requesting a meal or snack one that is no different from those served to their peers. All students will have access to the school's meal or snack services regardless of the debt owed.

If a student owes money for a meal or snack that is in excess of the charged limit as determined by the student's school district, a school may contact the parent or guardian of the student to collect the money owed or request that the parent or guardian apply for benefits.

If a student is unable to pay for a meal or snack, or owes money for a meal or snack, a school shall not stigmatize the student in any way, including but not limited to requiring the student to wear a wrist band or hand stamp, requiring the student to dispose of the meal or snack, publicly making known the student's name, or requiring the student to sit in a separate dining area.

Establishing a Meal Charge Policy

It is important that meal charges are clearly communicated to school administrators, school food service professionals, families, and students. Developing and communicating meal charge policies prevents confusion for students and families and promotes effective financial management of the school meal programs. School Food Authorities (SFAs) must develop and implement a SFA-level policy for each school operating the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. In developing a meal charge policy, Food and Nutrition Services encourages the adoption of policies that allow children to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day, minimize identification of children, and maintain the financial integrity of the nonprofit school food service account. However, the specific policy is at the discretion of the SFA.

Meal Charge Policies in schools that sell a la carte foods in the cafeteria should include information regarding charge policies for a la carte foods in addition to charge policies for reduced or paid reimbursable student meals.

SFAs also must include policies regarding the collection of delinquent meal charge debt in the written meal charge policy. Please note that, as with all aspects of program operations, food service management companies must operate in compliance with meal charge policies established by the SFA.

The Child Nutrition webpage has a resource page for local District's to utilize if assistance is needed. CN webpage link: <https://dese.ade.arkansas.gov/Offices/child-nutrition-unit/unpaid-meal-charges>

For more information please contact Courtney Erick or the school district's Area Specialist at 501-324-9502.

Attachments:

<http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/2019/2019R/Acts/Act428.pdf>

Attachments

- [Act_428_of_2019_110319.pdf](#)