

Fees for Electronic Payment Services in School Meal Programs

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Regulatory Authority: [FNS Instruction 782-6](#), [SP 18-2025](#)

Response Required: No

Attention: Superintendents, Child Nutrition Directors and Managers

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The purpose of this memo is to provide updated guidance from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding the use of electronic payment services for school meal programs, as outlined in [SP 18-2025](#). This guidance rescinds [SP 04-2025](#) and [SP 02-2015](#) and clarifies that fees may only be charged for electronic payments if a free and accessible payment method is also offered.

Fees for Electronic Payments:

Families may be charged a fee for using electronic payment services (e.g., credit card payments), only if the School Food Authority (SFA) **also offers at least one free and accessible method** for adding funds to student meal accounts.

Acceptable Free Methods Include:

- Cash or check payments at the school
- Mailing a check to the school

Family Notification Requirement:

SFAs must clearly communicate all payment options and associated fees in locations that are easy for families to find and understand, such as:

- The district's website and menus
- School communications and low-balance notices
- The online payment platform itself

Accessibility Considerations:

SFAs must accommodate families who lack access to a bank account, computer, or prefer not to use electronic payments.

Best Practices:

- Provide a phone number for a designated contact person to answer questions about free payment options
- Use payment systems that support ACH/bank transfers to help reduce costs
- Consider using donations, general funds, or the nonprofit food service account to cover payment fees, if feasible
- Collaborate with service providers to reduce or waive fees when possible

While it is no longer a requirement to eliminate electronic payment fees altogether, USDA continues to encourage SFAs to keep meal access equitable and affordable for all families.

If you have any questions, please contact your Area Specialist at 501-324-9502.