

Topic: Meal Charge Policy

Overview:

School Food Authorities (SFAs) participating in the NSLP and/or SBP are required to have a written and clearly communicated meal charge policy. Meal charge policies communicated to school administrators, school food service professionals, families, and students prevents confusion for students and families and promotes effective financial management of school nutrition programs.

Additionally, [ORS 327.537](#), commonly referred to as a ban on “lunch shaming”, established a statewide policy regarding unpaid meal charges which includes procedures school districts must follow when communicating with a student and the student’s parents or guardians about amounts owed for meals taken by the student. For further information on who [ORS 327.537](#) applies to, refer to [Oregon HB 3454 "Lunch Shaming Ban" Q & A](#).

Requirements:

- ✓ All SFAs must have a written and clearly communicated meal charge policy.
- ✓ The meal charge policy **must**:
 - Be provided to all households in writing at the beginning of each school year and to households that transfer to the school during the year.
 - SFAs must maintain documentation of the method used to communicate the policy.
 - Be provided to all staff responsible for policy enforcement such as school food service cashiers, staff that notify households of low balances, and staff involved in enforcing any aspect of the meal charge policy. Social workers, homeless liaisons, and school nurses as well as school principals and other administrators should be informed of the policy.
 - Include process and timeline for collection of unpaid meal charges.
- ✓ In accordance with [ORS 327.537](#), if you are a school district or other school subject to ORS 327.537, the meal charge policy **may not**:
 - Prohibit a child from receiving a reimbursable meal, regardless of their ability to pay. The only exception to this is if the school has written permission from the student’s parent or guardian to not provide the student a meal.
 - Provide a student who cannot pay for a meal a low cost alternative meal. The student must be offered the same choices as the other students.
 - Require student to work or do chores in order to pay for the meal.

- Direct any communication regarding unpaid balances to the student. All communication must be directed to the parent or guardian.
- ✓ Programs not required to comply with [ORS 327.537](#) the meal charge policy should allow children to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the day and minimize identification of children with insufficient funds to pay for meals.
- ✓ All programs should annually review and update their Meal Charge Policy.
- ✓ See Appendix B of the [USDA Handbook: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge](#) for Local Meal Charge Policy Checklist.
- ✓ See [Oregon HB 3454 "Lunch Shaming Ban" Q & A](#) for information regarding student debts for five or more meals and how to handle ongoing unpaid debt.

Helpful Resources:

- ✓ [USDA Unpaid Meal Charge Webpage](#)
- ✓ [USDA Handbook: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge](#)
- ✓ [Oregon HB 3454 "Lunch Shaming Ban" Q & A](#)

Regulatory Reference:

- ✓ [SP 46-2016 Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies](#)
- ✓ [SP 47-2016 Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments](#)
- ✓ [SP 57-2016 Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q & A's](#)
- ✓ [SP 58-2016 Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools](#)

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Acronym Reference and Definitions

-NSLP	National School Lunch Program
-SBP	School Breakfast Program
-SFA	School Food Authority

The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction created this document. The Oregon Department of Education modified the document to apply to Oregon.