

School Nutrition Program At-A-Glance

Topic: Meal Charge Policy

Overview:

School food authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) are required to have a written and clearly communicated meal charge policy in place in schools serving children at the reduced-price and paid rate who do not have money in their account or in hand to cover the cost of a meal at the time of service. Meal charge policies must be communicated to school administrators, school food service professionals, families, and students to prevent confusion for students and families and to support effective financial management of the School Nutrition Programs.

Additionally, [ORS 327.537](#), commonly referred to the “lunch shaming” ban, establishes statewide requirements for how school districts must communicate and proceed with a student and the student’s parents or guardians regarding unpaid meal charges. For further information on who [ORS 327.537](#) applies to, refer to [Oregon HB 3454 \(2017\) "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 in writing to all households at the beginning of each school year and to households that transfer during the year.
 - SFAs must maintain documentation of how the policy was communicated.
 - Be provided to all staff responsible for enforcing the policy, including school food service cashiers, staff who notify households of low balances, and any staff involved in enforcing any aspect of the policy. Social workers, homeless liaisons, school nurses, principals and other administrators should also be informed.
 - Include the process and timeline for collecting unpaid meal charges.
- ✓ In accordance with [ORS 327.537](#), if you are a school district or other school subject to this statute, the meal charge policy **may not**:
 - Prohibit a child from receiving a reimbursable meal, regardless of ability to pay. The only exception is when the school has written permission from the student’s parent or guardian to not provide a meal.
 - Provide a low-cost alternative meal to a student who cannot pay. The student must be offered the same choices as other students.
 - Require a student to work or perform chores to pay for a meal.
 - Direct any communication regarding unpaid balances to the student. All communication must be directed to the parent or guardian.

- ✓ Programs not subject to [ORS 327.537](#) should ensure their meal charge policy allows children to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the day and minimizes identification of children with insufficient funds.
- ✓ All programs should review and update their meal charge policy annually.
- ✓ See Appendix B of the [USDA Handbook: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge](#) for Local Meal Charge Policy Checklist.
- ✓ See [Oregon HB 3454 \(2017\) "Lunch Shaming Ban" Q&A](#) for guidance on student debts for five or more meals and procedures for addressing ongoing unpaid debt.

Helpful Resources:

- ✓ [USDA Unpaid Meal Charge webpage](#)
- ✓ [USDA Best Practice Guide \(SP 29-2017\)](#): 2017 Edition of *Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools*
- ✓ [Oregon HB 3454 \(2017\) "Lunch Shaming Ban" Q&A](#)

Regulatory References:

- ✓ [USDA Memo SP 46-2016](#): Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies
- ✓ [USDA Memo SP 47-2016](#): Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments
- ✓ [USDA Memo SP 23-2017](#): Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Acronym Reference and Definitions

HB	House Bill
NSLP	National School Lunch Program
ORS	Oregon Revised Statutes
Q&A	Questions & Answers
SBP	School Breakfast Program
SFA	School Food Authority
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture