

Alternate Meals

Local education agencies are required to have a Meal Charge Policy. This policy may or may not offer alternate meals. LEAs are encouraged to have policies that 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.

The following chart outlines the Alternate Meal type options and corresponding requirements:

Meal Type Option	Meal Pattern Requirement	Claim/Program Requirement
Alternate Meal - Reimbursable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meets meal pattern requirements. • Student has full selection of menu options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEA may claim meal for reimbursement. • LEA may charge for meal. • PLE rules apply for paid meal price. • Number of meals must be included in annual PLE calculation.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meets meal pattern requirements. • Limits choices to lower cost entrees and other components. • Must offer at least two types of milk. • OVS – must provide selection of all 5 meal components in NSLP and 4 food items in SBP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEA may claim meal for reimbursement. • LEA may charge for meal. • PLE rules apply for paid meal price. • Number of meals must be included in annual PLE calculation.
Alternate Meal - Non-reimbursable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No meal pattern requirement. • Must meet FNS nutritional goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEA may NOT claim meal. • If provided at no charge, non-Federal funds must be used to cover cost of meal. • If student is charged, meal must meet Smart Snacks standards and Revenue from Non-program Food requirements.
Special Dietary Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Must ensure access to meals is the same as other students. ➤ Must ensure student has a safe environment to consume alternate meal. ➤ If LEA does not provide alternate meals, the LEA must consult with the 504 coordinator for specific needs of the child before denying a meal to a student with unpaid meal charges. ➤ Additional regulations for students with disabilities may apply beyond USDA guidance. 	

OSPI CNS School Meal Programs Reference Sheet

Details: Alternate Meal information to include in Meal Charge Policy

- It is recommended that LEAs include information about alternate meals in their meal charge policy:
 - The meal service during which alternate meals are offered;
 - The duration of the alternate meals. For example no more than 10 per school year;
 - If alternate meals must be paid for and if so, whether the cost is added to the students' delinquent account.
 - When alternate meals are offered. For example, immediately in lieu of charging, or after account reaches a negative balance.
 - How alternate meals are presented. For example, sack lunch, lower cost menu items, etc.

Reference:

- ✓ [SP 23-2017 Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A](#)

Resources:

- ✓ [Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge – Proven Strategies](#)
- ✓ [Meal Charge Policy Reference Sheet](#)

Acronym Reference

-LEA	Code of Federal Regulations
-NSLP	National School Lunch Program
-OVS	Offer vs. Serve
-PLE	Paid Lunch Equity
-SBP	School Breakfast Program
-SP	School Programs
-USDA	United States Department of Agriculture