

OSPI CNS School Meal Programs Reference Sheet

Local Meal Charge Policy

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) participating in the NSLP and/or SBP are required to have a written and clearly communicated meal charge policy. Meal charge policies that are communicated to school administrators, school food service professionals, families, and students prevent confusion for students and families and promotes effective financial management of school meal programs.

This reference sheet reviews the Federal Meal Charge Policy required by USDA. Washington state's [Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights Act](#) outlines additional state requirements that must be met.

Requirements

- All LEAs must have a written and clearly communicated meal charge policy.
 - If **all schools** in the SFA operate the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2, the SFA is not required to develop a meal charge policy as children will not be charged for meals.
- 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.
 - 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, school nurses, school principals, and other administrators should be informed of the policy.
 - Maintain documentation of the method used to communicate the policy.
 - Include process and timeline for collection of unpaid meal charges.
- The Meal Charge Policy **may**:
 - Allow charges, impose charge limits, or no limits, and may or may not offer alternate meals.
 - Prohibit charging for a la carte or "extra" items for negative accounts
 - Vary for elementary, middle, and high school.
- Meal charge policies should ideally 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.
- See Appendix B of the [USDA Handbook: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenges](#) for a Local Meal Charge Policy Checklist.



Details:

- Annually review and update the Meal Charge Policy
- Alternate Meals: See the Alternate Meal Section of the [USDA Handbook: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenges](#)
- [Washington state law – Hunger Free Student Bill of Rights](#)
- [RCW 28A.235.290](#) & [RCW 28A.235.300](#) – CEP requirements

Reference:

- [SP 23-2017 Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&As](#)
- [SP 29-2017 Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools](#)
- [SP46-2016 Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies](#)
- [SP47-2016 Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments](#)

Resources:

- [USDA Unpaid Meal Charges web page](#)
- [USDA Handbook: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenges](#)

Acronym Reference

- CEP – Community Eligibility Provision
- CNS - Child Nutrition Services
- LEA – Local Education Agency
- NSLP – National School Lunch Program
- OSPI - Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
- RCW – Revised Code of Washington
- SBP – School Breakfast Program
- SP – School Programs
- USDA - United States Department of Agriculture