




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Participating Sponsors of the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs
Non-participating Public Schools Providing Meals to Students

FROM: John D. Frassinelli, Division Director
School Health, Nutrition and Family Services 

DATE: June 15, 2022

SUBJECT: Operational Memorandum No. 11-22
Connecticut Statutory Requirements for Unpaid Meal Charges in Public Schools

This memorandum highlights the new state statutory requirements for public schools regarding unpaid meal charges. **These requirements apply to all public schools that serve meals to students regardless of whether they participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) or do not participate in the NSLP or SBP.**

State Requirements for All Public Schools (participating and non-participating)

Effective July 1, 2021, C.G.S. Section 10-215 was amended to include new requirements for the collection of unpaid meal charges and acceptance of gifts, donations, and grants for such a purpose. The statutory language is available in [Connecticut General Statutes \(C.G.S.\) Section 10-215 \(Amended 2021\)](#). These requirements apply to **all public schools** but do not apply to private schools or residential child-care institutions (RCCIs).

Local educational agencies (LEAs) **must create or update any policies and procedures** related to the collection of unpaid meal charges for children who are served meals, are not eligible for free meals but do not have money in their account or in hand to cover the cost of the meal at the time of service. Such policies must include the three elements listed below, as required by C.G.S. Section 10-215(b).

1. A prohibition on publicly identifying or shaming a child for any such unpaid meal charges, including, but not limited to, delaying or refusing to serve a meal to such child, designating a specific meal option for such child (such as offering a cheese sandwich as an "emergency meal"), or otherwise taking any disciplinary action against such child.
2. A declaration of the right for any child to obtain a meal, which **may exclude** any a la carte items **or be limited to one meal** for any lunch, breakfast, or other meal service. For example, the LEA's policy must allow each child to obtain a meal but could exclude allowing a la carte items or more than one lunch during the same lunch service period.

3. A procedure for communicating with the parent or legal guardian of a child for the purpose of collecting such unpaid meal charges. Communication must include but is not limited to:
 - contact information for local food pantries;
 - a free or reduced-price meal application including information regarding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), such as the Connecticut State Department of Education’s *Addendum C: Information on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*; and
 - a link to the town’s website listing any community services available to the residents of the town.

If a student’s unpaid meal charges equal or exceed the cost of 30 meals, the LEA must also refer the parent or guardian to the LEA’s designated local McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Education Liaison.

C.G.S. Section 10-215(c) allows a local or regional board of education to accept gifts, donations, or grants from any public or private sources for the purpose of paying any unpaid charges for school lunches, breakfasts, or other meal services.

Federal Requirements for Participating Sponsors of the NSLP and SBP

In addition to complying with the existing federal requirements for unpaid meal charges, LEAs must update any policies and procedures related to the collection of unpaid meal charges to include the requirements of C.G.S. Section 10-215(b) and (c). This memorandum includes a brief overview of the federal requirements as background for understanding the additional state requirements. The USDA’s guidance for school nutrition programs regarding unpaid meal charges is summarized in [USDA Memo SP 46-2016](#), *Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies*. LEAs that participate in the NSLP and SBP must have a policy in place that complies with this USDA guidance as well as the new state requirements outlined above.

As a reminder, the nonprofit school food service account (NSFSA) cannot be used to cover the costs of unpaid meal charges in the NSLP and SBP. For additional guidance, refer to [CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 04-17](#), *Guidance on Unpaid Meal Charges and Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments*, and visit the “[Unpaid Meal Charges](#)” section of the CSDE’s [Financial Management for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.

Please share this memorandum with district administrators to ensure compliance with the federal and state regulations. Questions may be directed to your [school nutrition consultant](#).

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Important: This is a numbered Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) operational memorandum that contains important program information. Please read carefully and retain for future reference. All CSDE operational memoranda are posted on the CSDE’s [Operational Memoranda for School Nutrition Programs](#) webpage.