

POLICY STATEMENT FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE BENEFITS

The School District is hereinafter called Local Education Agency (LEA).

The LEA has entered into agreement to participate in the National School Lunch Program, and/or School Breakfast Program, and/or Special Milk Program, and/or USDA Food Program, and/or After-School Snack Program, and/or Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The LEA accepts responsibility for providing free and reduced price meals or free milk to eligible children in schools under its jurisdiction **each school day**.

The Maine Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs is hereinafter called CNP.

The LEA assures CNP that the school system will uniformly carry out this policy in schools which participate in the programs named above. The LEA will determine children's eligibility for free milk only in qualifying early childhood education classes and milk only schools which participate in the Special Milk Program and carry out this policy therein. In fulfilling its responsibilities in its schools the LEA agrees to serve:

Free Meals or Free Milk (for early childhood education classes and milk only schools) to children:

- (1) from households approved by the LEA whose income is at or below the free meal income level shown in the annual eligibility guidelines;
- (2) for whom the school has state or local, SNAP or TANF office documentation of their current participation in SNAP or TANF Programs;
- (3) categorically free as indicated in Federal Regulation 7 CFR 245.6 and Federal Guidance.

Reduced Price Meals:

to children at a reduced price from the price charged to children paying full price. The price shall not be more than \$.40 for lunch and \$.15 for snack. Effective July 1, 2008, public school students eligible for reduced price meals will not be charged for breakfast. Breakfast meals must be counted and claimed as reduced. A state reimbursement of \$.30 per public school breakfast will be reimbursed with the monthly claim. These meals will be served only to children from households approved by the LEA whose income is at or within the reduced price eligibility guideline range. Private schools cannot charge more than \$.30 for reduced price breakfast.

SAU Requirement Language for the Application

OMB Circular A-133 *Audits of States, Local Governments and Non-Profit Organizations*, requires that grantees or sub-recipients that expend \$500,000 or more in Federal awards during their fiscal year are subject to an audit requirement. Audit requirements for State and local governments, and non-profit organizations receiving Federal awards or sub-awards, are defined in OMB Circular A-133, Subpart B, Audit Requirements (http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars_default/).

All School Administrative Units are required to comply with Title 20-A, Chapter 221, Subchapter 2 §6051 (6), requiring that each school board provide a copy of the audit report to the Commissioner of the Department of Education within six months after the end of the audit period (<http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/20-A/title20-Asec6051.html>).

I. The LEA agrees to operate its school food services as follows:

A. Non-Discrimination

The Maine Department of Education (MDOE) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, sexual orientation, or disability.

There will be no physical segregation of, or any other discrimination against, any child because of inability to pay the full price of the meal or milk. There shall be no overt identification of any such children. The names of children eligible to receive free or reduced price meals or free milk shall not be posted, published, or announced in any way. Furthermore, children eligible for free or reduced price meals or free milk shall not be required to:

1. use special tokens or tickets, or other means of identification,
2. work for their meals or milk,
3. use a separate dining area,
4. go through a separate serving line,
5. enter the dining area through a separate entrance,
6. eat meals or drink milk at a different time,
7. eat a different meal from the meal sold to children paying full price for a meal or drink milk different from that sold to children paying the full price for milk.

B. Anonymity and Accountability

Procedures will be carried out to collect money from children who pay for the meals or milk and to account for the number of free and reduced price and full price meals served at point of service or the number of cartons of free and full price milk served. The procedure(s) described in Attachment 4 (Suggested Anonymity and Accountability Systems) will be used so no other child in the school will consciously be made aware of the identity of the children receiving reduced price meals, free meals, or free milk by the procedures.

II. The LEA agrees to operate the eligibility process as follows:

A. Notice to Parents

At the beginning of each school year and whenever there is a change in eligibility criteria, the Letter to Parents will be sent to each family. A form on which to make application for free or reduced price meals or free milk will be attached.

B. Public Release

The local unemployment office and area employers contemplating large layoffs will be told of the eligibility criteria for free and reduced price meals and free milk and other information supplied in the letter to parents.

CNP is hereby authorized to notify the news media of the eligibility guidelines and other information regarding the application process.

C. Application

Parents or guardians will be asked to complete and return one application per family to the Approving Official(s).

Applications and local or state SNAP or TANF office documentation of SNAP or TANF participation will be accepted at any time during the year.

Every parent or guardian enrolling a child in school for the first time will be given an application.

The eligibility of a child will be transferred and honored whenever a child transfers from one school to another under the same jurisdiction of the LEA.

Parents or guardians will be given notification of the eligibility determination within 10 working days of the receipt of the application.

The service of meals or milk will start immediately upon establishing eligibility.

Parents or guardians will be informed in writing of reason(s) for rejection of their application. They will be advised of how to contact the Hearing Official.

Such applications and documentation of action taken will be kept for 7 years after the end of the school year to which they pertain to, or longer when unresolved audits are pending.

D. Application approval manually or by software program?
What software program is used?

- E. Special Provisions – Option (This option available with State Agency approval, allows student applications to be collected less frequently and tasks related to collection of applications, when both Lunch and Breakfast are approved for a provision option.) All options require State Agency approval.

Provision I:

Applications for free and reduced price meals will be collected bi-annually in schools with 80% or more of the attending students eligible for free or reduced price meals during October.

Provision II:

Schools may not charge students for their meals. During the base year the free and reduced price process must be followed. During subsequent years verification is not required. Schools during the base year must count reimbursable meals by category (free, reduced price and paid). Reimbursement in the subsequent 3 years is based on claiming percentages established in the base year.

Provision III:

Schools may not charge students for their meals. During the base year the free and reduced price process must be followed. During subsequent years verification is not required. Schools during the base year must count reimbursable meals by category (free, reduced price and paid). Reimbursement in the subsequent 4 years is based on reimbursement received in the base year, with annual adjustments for inflation and enrollment changes in the participating school.

Community Eligible Provision:

Students are not charged for their meals. This provision is based on community (school or district) economic status. This provision is a 5-year term. No applications are collected, no verification is conducted. Reimbursement is determined by a Federally provided percent.

- F. Approving Official

As Approving Official(s) the position(s) named below shall: review applications; decide eligibility of individual children for free and reduced price meals or free milk using the criteria outlined in this Policy; sign, date and show action on each application; and inform the parent of the action in writing, within 10 working days or receipt of the application.

- G. Hearing Official

The Hearing Official will be someone who did not participate in making the original eligibility decision under appeal or in any previously held conference. The Hearing Official cannot be the Approving Official or the Application Confirmation Official.

- H. Hearing Procedures

A fair hearing procedure will be established and used for an appeal by a household of the school's decision on the application for free or reduced price meals or free milk, a subsequent reduction or termination of benefits as a result of review procedures or verification and when the school official challenges the correctness of information in an application or the continued eligibility of a child for a free or reduced price meal benefit or free milk. During the appeal, hearing, and disposition of case, the child will receive free or reduced price meals or free milk.

Before starting the hearing procedure, the parent or guardian or local school official may ask for a conference to provide for a discussion of the situation, presentation of formation, and an explanation of data submitted in the application and decision made. This conference shall not prejudice or diminish the right to a fair hearing.

The fair hearing procedure shall provide:

1. a publicly announced simple method for making an oral or written request for a hearing;
2. an opportunity to be helped or represented by an attorney or other person in presenting an appeal;
3. a chance to examine, before and during the hearing, the documents and records used in making the decision under appeal;
4. a hearing held with reasonable promptness, convenience and adequate notice given about the time and place;
5. a chance to present oral or written evidence and supporting arguments;
6. that the hearing shall be conducted and the decision made by a hearing official who did not take part in making the decision under appeal or in any previous conference;
7. that the decision of the hearing official shall be based on the oral and documentary evidence presented at the hearing and made a part of the hearing record;
8. that the parties concerned and their appointed representative shall be told in writing of the decision of the hearing official;
9. that a written record shall be prepared of each hearing, which shall include: the decision under appeal; any documentary evidence and a summary of any oral testimony presented at the hearing; the decision of the hearing official, including the reasons therefore and a copy of the notification to the parties concerned of the decision of the hearing official; and
10. that such written record of each hearing shall be preserved for three years and shall be available for examination by the parties concerned or their representative at any reasonable time and place during such period.

Application Confirmation Official

Prior to any other verification activity, an LEA official, other than the approving official who made the initial eligibility determination, must review each approved application selected for verification to ensure that the initial determination was accurate. This person cannot be a Hearing Official or an Approving Official.

I. Verification of Applications

This process is required of the LEA for program participation in the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program.

Verification Official

The LEA will obtain from CNP the program regulations about verification of applications and will conduct such verification in accordance with program regulations by November 15 yearly and maintain all records and submit an online report to CNP by November 20 yearly. Training is offered yearly.

The verification official confirms eligibility for free and reduced price meals under the NSLP and SBP. Verification is only required when eligibility is determined through the application process. This person cannot be a Hearing Official or Approving Official.

J. Amendments to Policies

Any and all changes to the policy including eligibility criteria, applications, public announcements, etc., will be sent to CNP for approval before implementation. Such changes will be effective only upon written approval and all changes in eligibility criteria shall be publicly announced in the same manner used at the beginning of the school year.

K. Contract with a Food Service Management Company

The LEA can contract with a Food Service Management Company (FSMC) for the operation of School Food Service with proper procurement methods. The FSMC contract must be reviewed by the Department of Education as required in Federal Regulation 7 CFR 210.16. Contracts cannot have a term longer than one year, with four one-year renewals, as required by 7 CFR 210.16(d). The FSMC cannot be responsible for the Free and Reduced Price Meal eligibility determination.

Contract must be included and approved prior to implementation.