

Alaska Model Unpaid Meal Policy
Adapted from FRAC Model Policy

Southeast Island School District recognizes the important link between proper nutrition and academic success. The District currently does not charge any student for school meals, regardless of whether they qualify for free or reduced-price meals. The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent district procedure, in the event that the District does choose to charge students for meals, for charging meals when students do not have money to pay, preventing meal charges, and ensuring eligible children are certified for free and reduced-price school meals.

Charging meals:

Because hunger is an impediment to learning, no child shall be denied a school meal because of an inability to pay. Children will be served a meal that meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrition standards for school meals.

Select an option:

- *Schools can offer students unable to pay either a regular menu meal or a lower-cost alternate meal that meets nutrition standards, but does not overtly identify children.*

Or

- *School districts can allow students to charge reimbursable meals up to a certain number of meals or dollar amount and then provide an alternate meal after that.*

Hand stamps, stickers, or any other means of overt identification of children with unpaid meal debt in the cafeteria or the classroom are prohibited. Additionally, children with unpaid meal debt shall not be required to work off their debt, including, but not limited to, wiping down tables or cleaning the cafeteria.

Preventing meal charges:

To ensure that all eligible families are certified for free and reduced-price school meals, the school nutrition department shall:

- provide all households with school meal applications prior to the start of the school year and/or include instructions for completing online school meal applications;
- provide access to school meal applications online at <https://schoolmealsapplication.education.alaska.gov/Register.aspx>;
- provide school meal applications in the primary language of the parent or guardian and provide assistance with completing an application for any household that requests assistance;

- promptly utilize data provided by the state or other school district officials to certify eligible children without an application; and
- assure that any child for which the school district is not able to obtain a completed school meal application, but becomes aware of their eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals shall be certified based on an application submitted by the appropriate school official, as permitted by USDA guidance.

To ensure that households are aware of negative account balances and the potential to accrue meal debt, the school nutrition department will:

- send out low balance notices prior to students needing to charge meals;
- notify and/or work with principals, school counselors, and/or teachers to understand the student and parent's situation and if a school meal application is needed;
- use email alerts to notify parents of negative balances.

Collecting unpaid meal debt:

All communication regarding unpaid meal debt shall be directed at parents or guardians. Schools may send children home with a letter in an unmarked envelope.

Prior to contacting households regarding unpaid meal debt, the school district shall ensure that the student is not participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, , Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), or other federal programs, which would confer categorical eligibility for free school meals, or is not homeless, migrant, or in foster care, and would allow them to be certified without an application.

Any household with a negative school lunch account balance shall be contacted immediately by school staff by email, phone, or letter home to provide information on how to apply for free or reduced-price school meals or to add funds to the school nutrition account.

For households that cannot afford to pay their school meal charges, the school district will work with them to establish a payment plan.

Households that are subsequently certified for free or reduced-price school meals at a point later in the school year shall not immediately be required to repay school meal debt accrued in that school year. The school district will retroactively reduce charges to the child's account from the date of district receipt of application.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of

hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) online and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.