

To: Authorized Representatives of School Nutrition Programs

From: Child and Adult Nutrition Services

Date: May 15, 2018

Subject: Charging Meals for the National School Lunch Program

Memo Number: SNP 205-1

This memo replaces the previous memo number 57 on this topic. The purpose of this memo is to guide schools on creating a meal charging policy in the School Nutrition Programs (National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, Afterschool Snack, and Special Milk Program).

This information should be shared with staff that create policies on meal charging. Questions about this memo can be referred to a SD Dept. of Education Child and Adult Nutrition Services staff member. Questions about this memo can be referred to a SD Dept. Of Education Child and Adult Nutrition Services staff member.

Schools must establish a written policy for students to charge meals in the lunch/breakfast program and this policy must also indicate how unpaid charges will be collected. Families sometimes accumulate a bill that is greater than they can pay. Some of these families are too proud to apply for free or reduced price lunches. Some simply do not qualify for free or reduced price lunches, but have difficulty having money available to pay their school lunch bill. Others wait until later into the year after accumulating a bill before they apply, which causes problems as applications for free or reduced meals are not retroactive beyond the month in which they are approved. SP 23-2017-Unpaid Meal Charges by July 1, 2017, all SFAs operating NSLP or SBP must have a written and clearly communicated meal charge policy.

The school board should set a limit on the number of meals which may be charged per child. For example, in a system which asks students to pay for their meals in advance, a limit would be set on how many meals could be accumulated. For a school system which bills retroactively, you would set a limit on when the bill is due and how many days past due the children will be allowed to charge their meals. This can be varied by grade level, and is up to the SFA to decide and is not dictated by the federal government. The federal government expects that the non-profit food service fund's integrity is maintained, that children are fed a nutritious meal, and that children's identity is maintained and they are not embarrassed by lack of funds to pay (no lunch shaming), when writing the unpaid meal policy.

If a child or a family of children is to be denied meals, it is recommended that you talk to the child(ren) out of class or in the office so that they should not try to go through the lunch line

unless they have money to pay for that specific meal. Parents should be warned in advance that if the bill is not paid within a certain number of days, the children will be denied meals in the school lunch room beginning on that date, if this is how the policy reads. This policy must be consistently implemented, and it must be distributed to parents – in parent packet, via website, school handbook – all means available. The school staff and administration as well as food service, must also be educated on how to handle these situations, so that overt identification and embarrassing the student does not occur.