



## School Meals for School Year 2022-23

### Questions and Answers

Updated 6/1/22

#### **Free and Reduced Price Meal Applications**

##### **Q: Will school meals be free of charge for ALL students in school year (SY) 2022-23?**

**A:** No, Congress did not extend school meal waivers and school meals will no longer be available to ALL students free of charge. The waiver authority to provide free meals for all students will be expiring at the end of SY 2021-22. Students that do not qualify for free meals will be charged for each meal they take at the beginning of SY 2022-2023.

##### **Q: Will schools be required to make available and collect free and reduced price meal applications from households for SY 2022-23?**

**A:** Yes. Collecting free and reduced price applications is essential to ensure that students that qualify can receive free or reduced priced meals and schools receive Kansas At-Risk funding. Applications cannot be distributed to households prior to July 1, 2022.

##### **Q: Are there other ways in which households can qualify for free or reduced price meal benefits besides applying with a free and reduced price meal application?**

**A:** Yes. Households can also qualify for free and reduced price meals and be eligible for At-Risk Funding through a process called Direct Certification. Another way in which households can receive free meal benefits is if a school qualifies and has elected to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision.

##### **Q: What is direct certification?**

**A:** Direct Certification is a process conducted by the school to certify eligible children for free or reduced price meals without the need for household applications to students who are already eligible to receive Food Assistance (FA), Temporary Assistance to Families (TAF), are Foster Children, or, new for SY 2022-23, receive certain Medicaid benefits.

##### **Q: What is the Community Eligibility Provision?**

**A:** The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas. CEP allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications. Instead, schools that adopt CEP are reimbursed using a formula based on the percentage of students categorically eligible for free meals based on their participation in other specific means-tested programs, such as Food Assistance (FA) and Temporary Assistance to Families (TAF).

##### **Q: Can schools require households to complete the free and reduced price meal application?**

**A:** No. Households cannot be required to complete a free and reduced price application but it must be made available to all households.

##### **Q: Is there a way for households to apply online for free and reduced price meal benefits?**

**A:** A USDA Technology Grant has made it possible for KSDE Child Nutrition & Wellness to develop an Online Application for Free and Reduced Price Meals. It will be available free of charge to sponsors to use for SY 2022-2023. Sponsors can also be approved to use an existing online application. Sponsors opting to use the Kansas Online Application for Free and Reduced Price Meals are not required to complete the Request to Use Electronic Transactions in Child Nutrition Programs form. Contact the Child Nutrition & Wellness office at 785-296-2276 for more information.

**Q: Is there a reason why making online applications should be offered?**

**A:** Offering online applications may increase the number of families who complete them and can reduce stigma. If online applications are available, make a paper application easily available, too, as many families may not have consistent internet access. Make sure the application is available in all languages spoken in the school district.

**Q: When can applications for free and reduced price meals be distributed to households?**

**A:** Applications for free and reduced price meals cannot be distributed to households prior to July 1, 2022.

**Q: Can the Household Economic Survey that was used in SY 2021-2022 be used to qualify students for free and reduced price meals?**

**A:** No. The Household Economic survey that was used in SY 2021-2022 cannot be used to qualify students for free and reduced price meals.

**Q: Can schools carryover the eligibility status for households that completed the Household Economic Survey in SY 2021-22 for Child Nutrition Benefits?**

**A:** No. The Household Economic survey that was used in SY 2021-2022 cannot be used to qualify students for free and reduced price meals and cannot be used to provide 30-day carryover for students for SY 2022-23 for Child Nutrition Benefits.

**Q: Can schools carryover eligibility status from students directly certified in SY 2021-22?**

**A:** Yes. For up to 30 operating days into the new school year (or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever comes first) an individual child's eligibility status determined through Direct Certification will continue.

**Q: Can schools carryover eligibility status from the most recent free and reduced price application eligibility determination or direct certification data for each particular student?**

**A:** Yes. USDA has provided guidance that the most recent data back to SY 2019-20 can be used for up to 30 operating days into the new school year (or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever comes first).

**Q. How does a Sponsor elect Waiver 26: Carryover Eligibility to use carryover eligibility status from the most recent free and reduced price application eligibility determinations back to SY 2019-20 or Direct Certification data from SY 2020-21 or SY 2019-20?**

**A.** Sponsors must request Waiver 26: Carryover Eligibility by completing the survey at the following link: [https://ksde.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0iwl98i56C3o99A](https://ksde.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0iwl98i56C3o99A)

**Q. Are schools required to use the most recent data back to SY 2019-20 for each particular student for carryover?**

**A:** No. Schools can choose not to provide carryover based on applications from previous school years. This is a local level decision that should be discussed with school administration.

**Q. Will schools need school board minutes to support using the carryover waiver (Waiver #26) allowing for use of the most recent data back to SY 2019-20 for each particular student for carryover?**

**A.** No. Schools will opt into the carryover waiver by completed the following survey: [https://ksde.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0iwl98i56C3o99A](https://ksde.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0iwl98i56C3o99A). School board minutes will not be required to elect the waiver. Schools are strongly encouraged to visit with administration when determining whether to utilize the carryover waiver.

**Q. Is carryover status based on the student's verified status or the student's original application status?**

**A:** Carryover would be based on the student's verified status if a student's application was selected for verification.

**School Meal Reimbursement****Q: Do schools receive federal reimbursement for free, reduced and paid meals?**

**A:** Yes. Schools receive reimbursement for each free, reduced, and paid meal that is served. Reimbursement rates differ based on the eligibility status.

**Q: Have the reimbursement rates for SY 2022-23 been released?**

**A:** No, reimbursement rates are set at the federal level using the consumer price index (CPI) for May and are expected by mid-July.

**Pricing School Meals****Q: When will households start being charged for meals?**

**A:** Students that do not qualify for free meals will be charged for each meal they take at the beginning of SY 2022-2023.

**Q: Is there a maximum meal price that schools can charge for reduced price meals?**

**A:** Yes. Households that qualify for reduced price meals can be asked to pay no more than 30 cents per breakfast and 40 cents for lunch.

**Q: Can schools choose to charge less or even waive reduced price charges for students?**

**A:** Yes. Schools can choose to charge less or even waive reduced price charges for both breakfast and lunch for students, which is an allowable expense to the food service fund.

**Q: Can schools choose to waive paid price charges for students?**

**A:** It depends. Schools may choose to:

- Provide universal free breakfast for all students.
  - Covering the cost of breakfast meals served to students certified for reduced price or paid meals is an allowable use of the nonprofit school food service account as long as the school food authority has sufficient funds to do so.
  - Prior to implementing this option, school food authorities are advised to conduct a thorough analysis of their current and projected operating costs to ensure that they are able to maintain operations and meal quality without the revenue generated from charging students for paid and reduced price breakfast meals.
- Allow students who qualify for reduced price meals to eat free of charge for both breakfast and lunch.
- Universal free lunch is not allowable due to the paid lunch equity tool requirements, unless a Sponsor elects Waiver #25: Paid Lunch Equity that allows Sponsors to use Federal Food Service funds to offset paid lunch meal prices for School Year 2022-23 only.

**Q: Why is Kansas applying for the statewide waiver flexibility for Paid Lunch Equity when all Kansas sponsors are required to keep a positive balance within its food service fund?**

**A:** Applying for this statewide waiver would allow schools to utilize food service funds to decrease the paid meal price for lunch for households assisting in the transition back to normal operations.

**Q. How does a Sponsor elect Waiver 25: Paid Lunch Equity to use Federal Food Service funds to offset the paid lunch meal prices for SY 2022-23?**

**A.** Sponsors must request Waiver 25: Paid Lunch Equity by completing the survey at the following link: [https://ksde.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_9QtdeFy9XixitpA](https://ksde.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9QtdeFy9XixitpA)

**Q: Are schools required to review their paid lunch prices to ensure compliance with the paid lunch equity requirement using the USDA Paid Lunch Equity Tool (PLE)?**

**A:** Only School Food Authorities with a negative balance in the nonprofit food service account as of December 31, 2021 are required to establish a price for paid lunches served through the National School Lunch Program that complies with the paid lunch equity provisions during SY 2022-23. Waiver 25: Paid Lunch Equity does not need to be requested for use of this flexibility.

**Q: Who determines the meal price for paid meals?**

**A:** Local school boards are required to set and approve student and adult meal prices annually.

**Q: What should local school boards consider when setting meal prices?**

**A:** Local school boards should consider food, labor and other costs, the impact of price on program participation, general fund subsidies and federal and state reimbursement rates. The student cost for a full price meal may vary by grade level. Increased food, supply and labor costs over the past few years may mean that schools need to increase the paid student meal price to help ensure that food service operations can cover the costs of operation.

**Q: How are adult meal prices set?**

**A:** Schools can choose to serve adults and must price adult meals so that the adult payment covers the entire cost of the meal. While adults will receive the same meal and quantity of food that a student receives, adults may pay more out of pocket for a lunch than a paid student because the school will receive some federal reimbursement for the paid student meal while no reimbursement is received for an adult meal.

**Written Meal Charge Policy****Q: Are schools required to have a policy addressing unpaid meal charges?**

**A:** Yes. All schools must have a policy in place to address how students who pay the full or reduced price cost of a reimbursable meal are impacted by having insufficient funds on hand or in their account to purchase a meal.

**Q: How should schools handle students with a previous negative balance?**

**A:** Schools should refer to their local meal charge policy.

**Q: What are schools required to have in a written meal charge policy.**

**A:** The written meal charge policy must:

- Be approved by the local school board.
- Address how students who pay the full or reduced price cost of a reimbursable meal are impacted by having insufficient funds on hand or in their account to purchase a meal and include information regarding the collection of delinquent meal charge debt.
- Be provided in writing to all households at the start of each school year and to households that transfer to the school during the school year. This can be in student handbooks, school newsletters, enrollment materials, the reverse side of the menu calendar or other written communications.
- Be communicated to all district/school staff responsible for enforcing any aspect of the policy.
- Be maintained in records including the written policy and how it is communicated to households and staff.



**Q: What should local school boards consider when developing a meal charge policy?**

**A:** In developing a meal charge policy, local school boards should consider adoption of policies that:

- allow children to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day,
- minimize identification of children with insufficient funds to pay for school meals,
- maintain the financial integrity of the nonprofit school food service account and prevent or limit unpaid meal charges, and
- address previous negative balances.

Policies may allow students to charge all types of available reimbursable meals, offer alternate meals at the cost to the school district, impose a limit on charges, or allow neither meal charges nor offer alternate meals. Additionally, policies may be consistent for all students or vary based on student grade levels.

**School Meal Service Options**

**Q: Will students be required to consume School Nutrition Program meals on the school campus during SY 2022-23?**

**A:** Yes, meals must be consumed by students on the school campus during SY 2022-23.



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