

**ARKANSAS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, DIVISION OF ELEMENTARY
AND SECONDARY EDUCATION, CHILD NUTRIITON UNIT (CNU)
POLICY STATEMENT FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEALS
2023-2024**

The School Food Authority/Local Education Agency (SFA/LEA) agrees to participate in the following program(s):

- _____ National School Lunch (NSLP) CFDA #10.555
- _____ School Breakfast (SBP) CFDA # 10.555/10.553
- _____ Afterschool Snack (approved Schedule B required before implementation) CFDA # 10.555
- _____ Special Milk (available only for schools without NSLP or SBP, or for half-day kindergarten students to whom breakfast or lunch is unavailable)
- _____ Seamless Summer Option (approved Schedule C required before implementation) CFDA # 10.555

Base Year Provision 2: 20____ - 20____

The SFA/LEA accepts responsibility for providing free and reduced price meals to eligible children in the schools under its jurisdiction.

I. Free Meals - Serve meals free to children in households that submit a complete household application and the household income is at or below the free limit of the income eligibility guidelines or the household provides a current SNAP case number, and to all categorically eligible students on the direct certification list, foster children list, migrant list, homeless list, and runaway list maintained by the school district. (Foster children are categorically eligible for free meals and may be included as family members of the foster family if the foster family chooses to also apply for benefits for other children. Including children in foster care as household members can help other children in the household qualify for free or reduced priced meals. If the foster family is not eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits, this does not prevent a foster child from receiving free meal benefits.)

II. Reduced Price Meals - Serve meals at a reduced price to children from households that submit a complete income application and the household income is within the reduced price limit income eligibility guidelines.

III. Limit Reduced Price Costs - Set reduced price charges for lunch and breakfast at or below the maximum reduced price allowed by regulation (\$.40 for lunch, \$.30 for breakfast) and below the full price of the lunch or breakfast.

IV. Duration of Eligibility - Eligibility status of students will be honored for the entire fiscal school year except when:

- The original eligibility certification of household was incorrect.
- The verification of a household's eligibility does not support the benefits being received.

V. Equal Treatment - Ensure no physical segregation or any other discrimination against any child because of his/her inability to pay the full price of the meal. The names of the children eligible to receive free or reduced price meals shall not be published, posted, or announced in any manner, and there shall be no overt identification of any such children by use of special tokens, tickets, or any other means. Further assurance is given that children eligible for free or reduced price meals shall not be required to:

- work for their meals,
- use a separate dining room service area,
- go through a separate serving line,
- enter the dining room through a separate entrance,
- eat meals at a different time, or
- eat a meal different from the one sold to children paying the full price.

VI. Nondiscrimination - Operate the school nutrition programs in accordance with federal law to prohibit discrimination so that no child shall be discriminated against because of race, sex, color, national origin, age, or disability.

VII. Disclosure – To prevent the disclosure of confidential free and reduced price eligibility information, the SFA/LEA will adopt all measures stated in 7 CFR 245.6(f-k).

VIII. Verification - Verify eligibility of applicant households in accordance with program regulations and annually maintain records as follows: (1) Verification Collection Report (FNS-742) – which includes a summary of verification efforts, number of total applications on file by October 1st and the number of applications verified, (2) documentation of any changes in eligibility and the reasons for the changes on the Application Tracker, (3) all relevant correspondence between the household selected for verification and the school food authority or school, and (4) all verified applications must be readily retrievable by school and must include all documents submitted by the household in an effort to confirm eligibility, reproductions of those documents, or annotations made by the determining official which indicate the type of document used, the income shown on the document, the time frame of the document, and the date of the document.

Compliance with these requirements will be monitored by the State agency as part of its monitoring reviews.

IX. Appeal and Hearing Process - Establish and use a fair hearing procedure under which a household can appeal a decision made by the school food authority with respect to the household's application for benefits and/or any subsequent reduction or termination of benefits. During the appeal and hearing, the child who was determined to be eligible based on the information provided on the application will continue to receive free or reduced price meals. Households appealing a reduction or termination of benefits as a result of verification of eligibility will continue to receive benefits if they appeal within the 10-day advance notice period. Prior to initiating the hearing procedure, the school official or the parents or guardians may request a conference to provide an opportunity to discuss the situation, present information, and obtain an explanation of data submitted on the application and the decisions rendered. Such a conference shall not in any way prejudice or diminish the right to a fair hearing.

The name and title of the designated hearing official is listed on the Child Nutrition Contact Information attachment to this Policy Statement.

The designated hearing official shall ensure that the hearing procedure provides the following for both the household and the school food authority:

- a publicly announced, simple method for making an oral or written request for a hearing;
- an opportunity to be assisted or represented by an attorney or other person;
- an opportunity to examine, prior to and during the hearing, the documents and records presented to support the decision under appeal;
- reasonable promptness and convenience in scheduling a hearing and adequate notice as to time and place;
- an opportunity to present oral or documentary evidence and arguments supporting a position without undue interference;
- an opportunity to question or refute any testimony or other evidence and to confront and cross-examine any adverse witness(es);
- that the hearing be conducted and an official who did not participate in the decision under appeal or any previous conference make the decision. It is recommended that the hearing official hold a position at a higher administrative level than the determining official;
- that the decision of the hearing official be based on the oral and documentary evidence presented at the hearing and entered into the hearing record;
- that the parties concerned and their designated representatives, if any, be notified in writing of the decision;
- that for each hearing a written record be prepared that includes: the decision under appeal, any documentary evidence, a summary of any oral testimony presented at the hearing, the decision of the hearing official and the reasons for that decision, and a copy of the notification to the parties concerned of the hearing official's decision; and
- that such written record must be retained for a period of 5 years after the end of the Federal fiscal year to which it pertains. These records must be made available for examination by the parties concerned or their designees at any reasonable time and place during such period.

X. Determining Officials - The determining official(s) review Free and Reduce Price Meal Applications and other source documents to make eligibility determinations. Such officials will use the criteria outlined in this policy to determine which individual children are eligible for free and reduced price meals. The Position Title of the Determining Official (s) is/are listed on the Child Nutrition Program Contact Information attachment to this Policy Statement.

XI. Confirming Official – The Confirming Official is designated as responsible for confirming the correct eligibility determination on all applications selected for verification. (This person cannot be the determining and/or hearing official.) The Position Title of the Confirming Official is listed on the Child Nutrition Program Contact Information attachment to this Policy Statement.

XII. Verifying Official(s) – The Verifying Official(s) is designated as responsible for completing verification requirements as specified in the *Eligibility Manual for School Meals*. The Position Title of the Verifying Official (s) is/are listed on the Child Nutrition Program Contact Information attachment to this Policy Statement.

XIII. Media Release - Submit a media/press release containing reduced price eligibility guidelines and other information contained in the parent letter to the local news media, local unemployment offices, local minority and grassroots organizations, and major employers contemplating or experiencing large layoffs. The Media Release is an attachment to this Policy Statement and is updated each school year.

XIV. Application Forms and Process – Establish a specific procedure for distributing and accepting applications for free and reduced price meal benefits or for free milk. Procedure should also include detailed description of the direct certification processes followed to obtain documentation for determining children’s eligibility through direct certification. Households that are directly certified must be provided a notice of eligibility. This notice of eligibility letter is included in the Forms and Letters attachment to this Policy Statement.

Develop and distribute to each household a notice about program benefits and an application form for free and reduced price meals. These forms shall be distributed at or about the beginning of each school year and whenever there is a change in eligibility criteria.

The notice to households with the meal application attachment shall have only the income eligibility guidelines for reduced price meals with an explanation that households with incomes at or below the reduced price guidelines may be eligible for either free or reduced price meals. The notice to households is part of the Free and Reduce Price Meal Application attachment to this Policy Statement.

Interested households are responsible for filling out the application and returning it to the school for review. The SFA/LEA shall maintain documentation of eligibility determinations for a period of 5 years following the end of the Federal fiscal year to which they pertain, or longer when there are unresolved audits or reviews pending.

Applications may be submitted at any time during the year. Households enrolling a child in a school for the first time shall be supplied with appropriate meal application materials regardless of the time of year the child is registered. If a child transfers from one school to another under the jurisdiction of the same SFA/LEA, his/her eligibility for free or reduced price meals will be transferred to and honored by the receiving school. If a child transfers from one school district to another school district, a copy of his/her eligibility for free or reduced price meals may be transferred to the receiving school. All applications must be readily retrievable by school.

The SFA/LEA shall promptly notify households of the approval or denial of their application(s). Children will be served meals immediately upon the establishment of their eligibility. The notification of meal benefits letter is part of the Forms and Letters attachment to this Policy Statement.

When an application is denied, households will be provided written notification that shall include: (1) the reason for the denial of benefits, e.g., income in excess of allowable limits or incomplete application; (2) notification of the right to appeal; (3) instructions on how to appeal; and (4) a statement reminding households that they may reapply for free and reduced price benefits at any time during the school year. The reasons for ineligibility shall be properly documented and retained on file at the school or SFA level for a period of 5 years after the end of the Federal fiscal year to which they pertain.

XV. Collection and Accountability - Establish a procedure to collect money from children who pay for their meals and to account at the point of service for the number of free, reduced price, and full price meals served to eligible children on a daily basis. Procedure should also include a description of how the SFA/LEA prevents overt identification of meal eligibility status when selling competitive foods during the meal service in the cafeteria. The collection procedure will be used so that no child in the school will be aware of such procedure or the identity of the children receiving free or reduced price meals. The Meal Count and Collection Procedures attachment to this Policy Statement provide the procedures used at each school within the SFA/LEA for both breakfast and lunch.

XVI. Revisions to Policies - Submit, in writing, to CNU, any revisions to the administrative procedures outlined above before implementation. Such changes will be effective only upon approval. All changes in eligibility criteria **must** be publicly announced in the same manner as announced at the beginning of the school year.

XVII. Procedures and Attachments - All attachments and procedures provided with this Policy Statement are considered part of the Agreement.

- i. **Meal Count/Collection Procedure** - Complete Meal Count and Collection Procedure, for both breakfast and lunch, and return with the Policy Statement.
- ii. **Forms and Letters Packet** - Sample Forms and Letters is a part of the Free and Reduced Price Meals Policy Statement. These forms will be used as instructed or the altered forms will be attached to this Free and Reduced Price Meals Policy Statement for approval by the CNU.

SFA/School District: _____

LEA #: _____

- iii. **Media Release** - The Media Release to be used for public notification and is a part of the Free and Reduced Price Meals Policy Statement. This form will be used as instructed or the altered form will be attached to this Free and Reduced Price Meals Policy Statement for approval by the CNU.
- iv. **Child Nutrition Contact Information** - The Child Nutrition Contact Information is the consolidated statement of district personnel assigned responsibilities in the Child Nutrition Program.
- v. **Free and Reduced Price Meal Application** – Free and Reduced Price Meal Household Application is part of the Free and Reduced Price Meals Policy Statement. This application will be used as instructed or the altered form will be attached to this Policy Statement for approval by the CNU.
- vi. **Spanish Language Version of Application and Forms** - The Spanish Language Version of Free and Reduced Price Meal Application and letters are part of the Free and Reduced Price Meals Policy Statement. This application will be used as instructed or altered form will be attached to this Policy Statement for approval by the CNU.
- vii. **Limited English Proficient (LEP)** - Families will be provided assistance and/or applications to assure there are no language barriers prohibiting eligibility of benefits or participation in the programs defined in this policy statement. LEAs are required to communicate with parents and guardians in a language they can understand throughout the certification and verification processes.

MEAL COUNT AND COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The procedures listed below will help assure equal treatment of all children, regardless of his or her ability to pay the full price for meals.

DIRECTIONS: For each item 1-6, select the option(s) that best describe the procedure used by each school. List the letter of the selected response under the section number, beside the school on the Meal Count and Collection Procedure Checklists for both breakfast and lunch.

Item 1: The medium of exchange at the point of service – Ticket, token, ID, name, number or physical identifier which students exchange for a meal:						
a. Roster system including coded/un-coded rosters, number lists, and class lists	b. Coded ticket/ token system with various ticket procedures	c. Coded ID cards used in manual and automated systems	d. Verbal identifiers (names & numbers)	e. Thumb print or finger print identification	f. Students enter ID# into automated systems	g. Other – attach description

Item 2: The collection of payment
a. Point of service payment with advance payments and/or charged meals – Students may pay daily, weekly or monthly, prior to meal service in both the cafeteria line and a designated area other than the cafeteria line (for example the school office or classroom); and/or students may charge full or reduced price meals. The meal charge may be paid in both the cafeteria line and a designated area other than the cafeteria serving line. In all cases, the students receiving the free and/or reduced price meals are treated like students who have prepaid or charged their meals. Money is collected BOTH: in serving line AND in a designated area other than the cafeteria serving line.
b. Students or parents may pay daily, weekly or monthly prior to meal service only in a designated area other than the cafeteria serving line (for example the school office or classroom); and/or students may charge full or reduced price meals. The meal charges may be paid in a designated area other than the cafeteria serving line. No money is collected in the serving line.
c. Advance payments and/or charged meals – Students or parents may pay daily, weekly or monthly prior to meal service through on-line payment system.
d. No money is collected from students for reduced price meals. Meals are counted and claimed by category with daily record documentation including Edit Check 1 and 2.
e. No money is collected from students for paying student meals. Meals are counted and claimed by category with daily record documentation including Edit Check 1 and 2.
f. This is a Provision 2 (P2) non-pricing school. No money is collected from students for meals.
g. This is a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) non-pricing school. No money is collected from students for meals.
h. This is a standard counting and claiming school, but no money is collected for meals. The district uses other funds to cover the cost of meals.
i. Other – attach description

Item 3: Notification of Payment Procedure – used at the beginning of the school year and/or registration to inform students of the payment and/or charge procedure for meal payments. If this is a P2 or CEP (non-pricing) school what is the method of notification to households informing them about the program?					
a. Letter to households	b. Public announcements to all students and households	c. Newspaper / newsletter	d. Posted notice (sign) displayed in the cafeteria	e. Notification in Student Handbook with signed acknowledgment from household	f. Other – attach description

The procedures described below will assure that a daily meal counts are made at the point of service and that no child will be aware that any other child receives a free or reduced price meal.

Item 4: Meal Count by Category – Only one reimbursable breakfast / lunch / snack may be claimed each day for each student.
a. Cashier at the end of the serving line who counts meals by category and monitors meals to assure only reimbursable meals are claimed for reimbursement. The cashier at the end of the serving line MUST be trained in meal pattern requirements. Documentation of training, signed by the cashier, must be on file.
b. *Cashier at the beginning of the serving line with a monitor at the end of the serving line to assure only reimbursable meals are claimed for reimbursement. The cafeteria monitor at the end of the serving line MUST be trained in meal pattern requirements. Documentation of training, signed by the monitor, must be on file.
c. *Classroom counts by category are confirmed at the serving line by the teacher or adult monitor who accompanies the class to the cafeteria and a cafeteria monitor at end of serving line to assure only reimbursable meals are claimed for reimbursement. The cafeteria monitor at the end of the serving line MUST be trained in meal pattern requirements. Documentation of training, signed by the monitor, must be on file.
d. *Other – attach a description
*A monitor at the end of the serving line <u>must notify</u> the person responsible for recording meal counts if a student does not take a reimbursable meal. The monitor must note the name of the student, so the meal count can be adjusted in the correct eligibility category. No substitute employee should be used for this duty without proper training.

Item 5: Charge Policy - Each school and/or school district must have a written charge policy that is published to households and implemented as published. How are households notified of the charge policy?					
a. Letter to households	b. Public announcement to all students and households	c. Newspaper / newsletter	d. Posted notice (sign) displayed in the cafeteria	e. Notification in Student Handbook with signed acknowledgment from household	f. Other – attach description

Item 6: Does this school have a SEPARATE a la carte line that serves ONLY non-reimbursable food items?	
a. Yes, and the school has a policy in place to ensure that free and reduced price students are not being overtly identified in the separate a la carte line.	b. No, this school does not have a separate a la carte line that serves non-reimbursable meals.

LUNCH MEAL COUNT/COLLECTION PROCEDURE CHECKLIST

Read carefully Meal Count and Collection Procedures on page 1 of this Attachment. List schools as reported on Program Schedule A. Beside each school name listed, select the letter(s) which best describe(s) the procedure(s) used by the school for each item 1-6 on page 5.

List letter(s) in the appropriate columns below. **In some cases more than one option may apply, if so list ALL options that apply.** If more lines are needed add additional pages.

N/A is not an acceptable option.

	List all schools listed on CN Program Schedule A	Item #1. Medium of Exchange	Item # 2. Payment/ Collections	Item # 3. Procedure Notification	Item # 4. Meal Count	Item # 5. Charge Policy	Item # 6. Separate A la Carte Line
	EXAMPLE School	a	d	a	b	a	b
1							
2							
3							
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LUNCH

BREAKFAST MEAL COUNT/COLLECTION PROCEDURE CHECKLIST

Read carefully Meal Count and Collection Procedures on page 1 of this Attachment. List schools as reported on Program Schedule A. Beside each school name listed, select the letter(s) which best describe(s) the procedure(s) used by the school for each item 1-6 on page 5.

List letter(s) in the appropriate columns below. **In some cases more than one option may apply, if so list ALL options that apply.** If more lines are needed add additional pages.

N/A is not an acceptable option.

	List all schools listed on CN Program Schedule A	1. Medium of Exchange	2. Payment/ Collections	3. Procedure Notification	4. Meal Count	5. Charge Policy	6. Separate A la Carte Line
	EXAMPLE School	a	d	a	b	a	b
1							
2							
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BREAKFAST

**FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEAL APPLICATION MATERIALS, FORMS AND LETTERS ATTESTATION STATEMENT
2023-2024 POLICY STATEMENT**

In the chart below, place an "X" in the column to indicate:

- the SFA will use the Prototype Free and Reduced Price Meal Application materials, forms and letters EXACTLY as published by the CNU
- the SFA is providing materials to be reviewed and approved

When using the CNU prototype materials the SFA will include specific information in the prototype regarding the SFA personnel contact information, etc. as required in **[brackets]**.

When checking SFA Materials Attached, **include the materials the SFA is submitting to the CNU for approval as part of the Policy Statement.** The SFA submitted materials may not be used or published by SFA without prior approval by the CNU.

If the SFA is using web-based Free and Reduced Price Meal Application and materials please **submit to the district area specialist for review and approval.**

Check the box to indicate if the SFA will use CNU Prototype materials exactly as published, or if SFA will submit materials to the CNU for approval.	CNU Prototype Materials	SFA Materials Attached	Not Applicable	Area Specialist Initials
Letter to Household (Frequently Asked Questions)				
Instructions on How to Apply				
Free and Reduced Price Meal Application				
Public Release				
Notice to Households of Approval/Denial of Benefits				
Notice of Direct Certification (If using Notice of Direct Certification from DC Portal check CNU Prototype)				
Notice of Students Residing with Direct Cert Students (optional)				
Notice of Approval Migrant, Homeless, Runaway, Foster, Head Start, Even Start				
We Must Check Your Application (Verification Announcement)				
We Have Checked Your Application (Verification Results)				
Verification Tracker Form				

**Method(s) Used by the SFA for distribution of
Free and Reduced Price Meal Applications and Direct Certification Procedures
2023-2024 Policy Statement**

Please indicate below (by checking the appropriate boxes) the method(s) the school district uses to distribute Free and Reduced Price Meal Application materials. The application materials include the Letter to Household (Frequently Asked Questions), Instructions on How to Apply and the Free and Reduced Price Meal Application.

REMINDER: 2023-2024 Free and Reduced Price Meal Application materials cannot be distributed to households, paper or online versions, until July 1, 2023.

The SFA must advertise available Child Nutrition Programs through a public release. How does the district plan to distribute the public release?

Check all that apply:

- | | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Website | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio | <input type="checkbox"/> Newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Food Banks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public offices | <input type="checkbox"/> Health Clinics | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

How does the SFA plan to distribute applications and directly certify students?

Check all that apply:

- Eligibility may be determined through the use of direct certification, in lieu of an application. Direct Certification portal will be accessed at least three times per school year.
- Directly Certify students for eligibility based on categorical list in lieu of an application
- Application materials are given to students at registration.
- Application materials are published on the school district website for households to print and complete for submission to district.
- Web-Based meal applications and materials are available for households to complete.
(This does not include downloadable meal applications made available on the school website.)
- Application materials are mailed to households.
- Application materials are included in new student packets.
- Application materials are handed out to all students in the district during the first week of school.
- Application materials are available at local businesses and community centers.
- Other method (please specify): _____

SFA/School District: _____

LEA #: _____

**School Food Authority Election to Use Date Flexibility in Free and Reduced Price Meal
Eligibility Determination
2023-2024 Policy Statement**

The United States Department of Agriculture School Policy memo SP 11-2014 clarifies the flexibility available to SFA officials for establishing the effective date of eligibility for children certified for free and reduced priced meals. The SFA will ensure that all Free and Reduced Price Meal Applications are processed and determined within ten (10) operating days of receipt of the application, as required by federal regulation. For SFAs using this flexibility the date of determination of the new eligibility status will be the date the application was submitted to the SFA.

If the SFA elects to use date flexibility you are agreeing to: The SFA agrees to:

- Have a procedure is in place for submitted applications.
- Refund any money paid (including debt forgiveness) before eligibility determination.
- Ensure Daily Records reflect accurate student eligibility and support the claim for reimbursement.
- Ensure eligibility determinations are updated in eSchool.

This flexibility would assist low income children by allowing them to access free or reduced price school meals during the eligibility determination period. It could also assist SFAs that are experiencing challenges with unpaid debt.

Check Below:

- Yes, we will use Date Flexibility**
- No, we will not use Date Flexibility**

Child Nutrition Contact Information and Appeals Hearing Attestation Statement 2023-2024 Policy Statement

<p>Determining Official(s)* – How many Determining Officials approve meal applications in the district? _____</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>* List additional on back of page</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Verifying Official</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Location of approved applications during the school year (Superintendent’s office, CN Directors office, etc.) _____</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Confirming Official – CANNOT be the same person as the Determining Official and/or Hearing Official</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Name _____</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Hearing Official – CANNOT be the same person as the Determining Official</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Position _____</p>

The SFA agrees to follow federal and state requirements necessary when a household files an appeal or asks for a formal hearing regarding student’s free and reduced price meal eligibility determination or as a result of verification activities.

Web-based Meal Applications 2023-2024 Policy Statement

The SFA will implement a web-based meal application process that meets all the federal and state requirements in accordance with 7 CFR Parts: 15, 210, 220, 245, and Title 2 CFR 200.

It is the responsibility of the SFA to train all personnel, including the technology support personnel associated with the web-based meal application process, with regard to compliance issues and confidentiality regulations in the Policy Statement.

**Web-based meal applications must be approved by CNU prior to use by the district for web publication.
When available, email the test link for the meal applications to the district Area Specialist.**

Check ✓ in the box indicating compliance with federal and state requirements:

SFA has written policies and procedures that apply to web-based meal application process for meal benefits to ensure:

- Online documents are legally binding,
- Security issues surrounding student and parent confidentiality and data protection is provided,
- Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) regulations are in compliance,
- Personal Identifiable Information (PII), i.e. social security numbers, are protected at all levels,
- Security issues regarding scanned documents/data storage have been fully addressed,
- Security, Backup, and Disposal of online documents containing FERPA and PII data align with district policy and procedures
- Access to web-based meal applications is made available to the CNU during applicable reviews,

Confirmation that **Level 2 Electronic Digital Signatures Authentication System** meets all requirements specified by the USDA, National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Guidance, the Arkansas Uniform Electronic Signatures Act, A.C.A. §25-31-101 et seq., the CNU, and applicable Arkansas Division of Information Services State Security Guidance.

- The SFA will NOT implement a web-based meal application process.

Approved by CNU Area Specialist: _____