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District Policy

8500 - FOOD SERVICES (M)

Section: Operations
Date Created: August 1974
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M

The Board of Education shall make school lunch available to all students enrolled in a school in the district unless less than five percent of enrolled students in the school are Federally eligible for a free or reduced price lunch in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:33-4. School lunches made available pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-4 and this Policy shall meet minimum nutritional standards, established by the Department of Education.

Free or reduced price breakfast and lunch, as required, shall be offered, under a school lunch program, school breakfast program, or a breakfast after the bell program, to all enrolled students who are determined to be Federally eligible for free or reduced price meals. As provided by N.J.S.A. 18A:33-4.a.(3) and N.J.S.A. 18A:33-14a.a.(2), any student who is eligible for a reduced price lunch and breakfast, pursuant to Federal income eligibility standards and criteria, shall not be required to pay for such lunch or breakfast. Free lunch or breakfast shall also be offered to each enrolled student who is Federally ineligible for free or reduced price meals, but who has an annual household income that is not less than one hundred and eighty-six percent, and not more than one hundred ninety-nine percent, of the Federal poverty level, as determined pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21b1.

- A. Breakfast Program – N.J.S.A. 18A:33-10; 18A:33-10.1; 18A:33-11; 18A:33-11.1; 18A:33-11.3; 18A:33-14a.

If twenty percent or more of the students enrolled in a school in the district on October 1 of the preceding school year were Federally eligible for free or reduced price meals under the National School Lunch Program or the Federal School Breakfast Program, the district shall establish a school breakfast program in the school in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:33-10.

Notwithstanding the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:33-10 to the contrary, if ten percent or more of the students enrolled in a school in the district on October 1 of the preceding school year were Federally eligible for free or reduced price meals under the National School Lunch Program or the Federal School Breakfast Program the district shall establish a breakfast program in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:33-10.1.

If seventy percent or more of the students enrolled in a school in the district on or before the last school day before October 16 of the preceding school year were Federally eligible for free or reduced price meals under the National School Lunch Program or the Federal School Breakfast Program, the district shall establish a breakfast after the bell program pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-11.3.

In accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:33-11, in implementing a school lunch program, pursuant to 18A:33-4 et seq., a school breakfast program, pursuant N.J.S.A. 18A:33-9 et seq., or N.J.S.A. 18A:33-10.1, or a breakfast after the bell program, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-11.1 or N.J.S.A. 18A:33-11.3, the district shall:

1. Publicize, to parents and students, the availability of the respective school meals program, as well as the various ways in which a student may qualify to receive free or reduced price meals under the program, as provided by N.J.S.A. 18A:33-4 and N.J.S.A. 18A:33-14a;
2. Make every effort to ensure that subsidized students are not recognized as program participants, by the student body, faculty, or staff, in a manner that is different from the manner in which unsubsidized students are recognized as program participants. Such efforts shall include, but need not be limited to, the establishment of a neutral meal plan or voucher system that does not make a distinction between subsidized and unsubsidized students; and
3. Make every effort to:
 - a. Facilitate the prompt and accurate identification of categorically eligible students who may be certified to participate in the program, on a subsidized basis, without first submitting an application therefore, and, whenever an application is required to establish eligibility for subsidized meals, encourage students and their families to submit a subsidized school meals application for that purpose;
 - b. Facilitate and expedite, to the greatest extent practicable, the subsidized school meals application and income-eligibility determination processes that are used, by the district, to certify a student for free or reduced price school meals on the basis of income, and assist parents in completing the school meals application; and
 - c. Encourage students who are neither categorically eligible nor income-eligible for free or reduced price school meals to nonetheless participate, on a paid and unsubsidized basis, in the program.

If the district participates in the Federal School Breakfast Program, the district is encouraged to increase the number of students participating in the program by establishing a breakfast after the bell program that incorporates school breakfast into the first-period classroom or the first few minutes of the school day pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-11.1.

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-14a., school breakfasts made available to students under a school breakfast program or a breakfast after the bell program shall meet minimum nutritional standards, established by the New Jersey Department of Education.

The State of New Jersey shall provide funding to each school in the district if the school operates a School Breakfast Program or a breakfast after the bell program, as may be necessary to reimburse the costs associated with the school's provision of free breakfasts, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-14a.b., to students who are Federally ineligible for free or reduced price meals.

B. Summer Food Service Program – N.J.S.A. 18A:33-23; 18A:33-24; 18A:33-25; 18A:33-26

In accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:33-24, if fifty percent or more of the students enrolled in the school district on or before the last school day before October 16 of the preceding school year were Federally eligible for free or reduced price meals under the National School Lunch Program or the Federal School Breakfast Program, the district shall become a sponsor or site under the Federal Summer Food Service Program or apply for a waiver pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-26.

In accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:33-23, the district shall notify each student enrolled and the student's parent of the availability of, and criteria of eligibility for, the summer meals program and the locations in the district where the summer meals are available. The district shall provide this notification by distributing flyers provided by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture pursuant to subsection N.J.S.A. 18A:33-23.c. The district may also provide electronic notice of the information through the usual means by which the district communicates with parents and students electronically.

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-26.a., the New Jersey Department of Agriculture may grant a waiver of the requirements of N.J.S.A. 18A:33-24 et seq. To be granted a waiver, the district must show that it lacks the staff, facilities, or equipment to sponsor the Federal Summer Food Service Program, or the means to finance the hiring or acquisition of such staff, facilities, or equipment. The New Jersey Department of Agriculture also may grant a waiver for one year to the district if a different sponsor currently runs the Federal Summer Food Service Program within the district's community.

Pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-26.b., the district shall report to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, in the manner prescribed by the New Jersey Department of Agriculture, its reasons for requesting a waiver of the requirements of N.J.S.A. 18A:33-24 et seq. The report shall include, but need not be limited to, a description of the specific impediments to implementing the program and actions that could be taken to remove those impediments or, where applicable, the identification of the sponsor that currently runs the program within the same community.

C. Information Provided to Parents Regarding the National School Lunch Program and the Federal School Breakfast Program – N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21b1

1. At the beginning of each school year, or upon initial enrollment, in the case of a student who enrolls during the school year, the school shall provide each student's parent with:

a. Information on the National School Lunch Program and the Federal School Breakfast Program, including, but not limited to, information on the availability of free or reduced price meals for eligible students, information on the application and determination processes that are used to certify eligible students for subsidized school meals, and information on the rights that are available to students and their families under N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21b1 and N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21; and

b. A school meals application form, as well as instructions for completing the application, and, as necessary, assistance in completing the application.

2. The school meals information and application provided to parents, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21b1.a. shall:

a. Be communicated in a language that the parent understands;

b. Specify the limited purposes for which collected personal data may be used, as provided by N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21b1.c.; and

c. Be submitted to the parent either in writing or electronically. In the latter case, the school district shall use the usual means by which it communicates with parents electronically.

3. A school meals application that is completed by a parent shall be confidential, and shall not be used or shared by the student's school or school district, except as may be necessary to:

a. Determine whether a student identified in the application is eligible for free or reduced price school meals;

b. Determine whether the school or school district is required, by N.J.S.A. 18A:33-11.3 or by N.J.S.A. 18A:33-24, to establish a breakfast after the bell program, or to participate as a sponsor or site in the Federal Summer Meals Service Program;

c. Ensure that the school receives appropriate reimbursement, from the State and Federal governments, for meals provided to eligible students, free of charge, through a school lunch program, a school breakfast program, a breakfast after the bell program, a summer meals program, or an emergency meals distribution program; and

d. Facilitate school aid determinations under the "School Funding Reform Act of 2008," N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-43 et seq.

D. Free or Reduced Price Meals' Application Process – 7 CFR 245

School meals applications shall be reviewed in a timely manner. An eligibility determination will be made, the family will be notified of its status, and the status will be implemented as soon as possible within ten operating days of receipt of the completed application pursuant to 7

CFR 245.6(c)(6). Any student found eligible shall be offered free or reduced price meals or free milk immediately upon the establishment of their eligibility and shall continue to receive such meals during the pendency of any inquiry regarding their eligibility in accordance with the requirements of the Division of Food and Nutrition, School Nutrition Programs, New Jersey Department of Agriculture. Carry-over of previous year's eligibility for students shall be in accordance with the requirements of the Division of Food and Nutrition, School Nutrition Programs, New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

In accordance with 7 CFR 245.6(c)(1) and (2), eligibility for free or reduced price meals, as determined through an approved application or by direct certification, must remain in effect for the entire school year and for up to thirty operating days in the subsequent school year. Prior to the processing of an application or the completion of direct certification procedures for the current school year, children from households with approved applications or documentation of direct certification on file from the preceding year, shall be offered reimbursable free and reduced price meals, as appropriate.

In accordance with 7 CFR 245.6(c)(6)(iii), children from households that notify the local educational agency that they do not want free or reduced price benefits must have their benefits discontinued as soon as possible.

Pursuant to 7 CFR 245.6(c)(7), if the district receives an incomplete school meals application or a school meals application that does not meet the eligibility criteria for free or reduced priced benefits, the school meals application must be denied. The district shall document and retain the denied school meals application and reasons for ineligibility for three years in accordance with 7 CFR 245.6(e).

In accordance with 7 CFR 245.6(c)(7), parents of students who are denied benefits must receive prompt, written notification of their denial. The notification may be provided by mail or e-mail to the individual who signed the school meals application. Posting the denial on the "notification" page of an online system does not meet this requirement. Likewise, informing the parent of denial via telephone does not meet this requirement. If the district uses an automated telephone information system to notify parents of denied benefits, the district must also provide the parents with written notification of the denial. The notification must provide the: reason for denial of benefits; right to appeal; instructions on how to appeal; and ability to reapply for free and reduced price benefits at any time during the school year.

In accordance with 7 CFR 245.6(e), the district shall record the eligibility determination and notification in an easily referenced format. The record shall include the: denial date; reason for denial; date the denial notice was sent; and signature or initials of the determining official (may be electronic, where applicable).

Any parents of students who have benefits that are to be reduced or terminated must be given ten calendar days' written notice of the change prior to the date the change will go into effect pursuant to 7 CFR 245.6a(j). The first day of the advance notice period shall be the day the notice is sent. The notice of adverse action may be sent via mail or to the e-mail address of the parent. The district cannot notify the household of adverse action by phone only.

Pursuant to 7 CFR 245.6a(j), the notice of adverse action must advise the parents of: change in benefits; reasons for the change; an appeal must be filed within the ten calendar days advance notice period to ensure continued benefits while awaiting a hearing and decision; instructions on how to appeal; and the parents may reapply for benefits at any time during the school year.

If the district participates in any National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, or provides free milk under the Special Milk Program, the district shall submit to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture a free and reduced price policy statement pursuant to 7 CFR 245.10.

In accordance with 7 CFR 245.1(b), the district shall avoid any policy or practice leading to the overt identification of students receiving free or reduced price meal benefits. Overt identification is any action that may result in a child being recognized as potentially eligible for or certified for free or reduced price school meals. Unauthorized disclosure or overt identification of students receiving free and reduced price meal benefits is prohibited. The district shall ensure that a child's eligibility status is not disclosed at any point in the process of providing free and reduced price meals, including: notification of the availability of free and reduced price benefits; certification and notification of eligibility; provision of meals in the cafeteria; and the point of service. In addition, the district shall ensure students who receive free and reduced price benefits are not overtly identified when they are provided additional services under programs or activities available to low-income students based on their eligibility for free and reduced price meals.

Pursuant to 7 CFR 245.2, disclosure means revealing or using individual student's program eligibility information obtained through the free and reduced price meal or free milk eligibility process for a purpose other than the purpose for which the information was obtained. Disclosure includes, but is not limited to, access, release, or transfer of personal data about students by means of print, tape, microfilm, microfiche, electronic communication, or any other means. It includes eligibility information obtained through the school meals application or through direct certification.

If the district accepts both cash and electronic payments, the district shall ensure students are not overtly identified through the method of payment pursuant to 7 CFR 245.8(b). To the maximum extent practicable, the district must ensure the sale of non-program foods and the method of payment for non-program foods do not inadvertently result in students being identified by their peers as receiving free and reduced price benefits.

The School Business Administrator/Board Secretary or designee will verify applications of those eligible for free or reduced price meals in accordance with the requirements of the Division of Food and Nutrition, School Nutrition Programs, New Jersey Department of Agriculture.

E. Meal Charge Program – N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21

The Board of Education provides a meal charge program to permit unsubsidized students in the district to charge for breakfast or lunch. Collection of any payment for a meal charge program account that is in arrears shall be addressed in accordance with provisions of this Policy.

“Unsubsidized student” means a student who is neither categorically eligible nor income-eligible for free or reduced price school meals, and who is, consequently, required to pay for any such meals that are served to the student under the National School Lunch Program or the Federal School Breakfast Program.

The Board of Education recognizes a student may not have breakfast or lunch (meal), as applicable, or money to purchase a meal at school on a school day causing the student’s meal charge account to fall into arrears. The district shall contact the student’s parent to provide notice of the arrearage and shall provide the parent with a period of ten school days to pay the amount due. If the student’s parent has not made full payment by the end of the designated ten school day period, then the district shall again contact the student’s parent to provide notice of any action to be taken by the school district in response to the arrearage.

A parent who has received a second notice their child’s meal bill is in arrears and who has not made payment in full within one week from the date of the second notice may be requested to meet with the Principal or designee to discuss and resolve the matter.

A parent’s refusal to meet with the Principal or designee or take other steps to resolve the matter may be indicative of more serious issues in the family or household. However, when a parent’s routine failure to provide breakfast or lunch is reasonably suspected to be indicative of child neglect, the Principal or designee shall immediately report such suspicion to the Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency as required in N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.10. Such reporting shall not be delayed to accommodate a parent’s meeting with the Principal or designee.

A school district shall report at least biannually to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture the number of students who are denied school breakfast or school lunch in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21.a.(2) and this Policy.

Nothing in N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21 or this Policy shall be construed to require the district to deny or restrict the ability of an unsubsidized student to access school breakfast or school lunch when the student’s school breakfast or school lunch bill is in arrears.

The school or school district shall not:

1. Publicly identify or stigmatize an unsubsidized student who cannot pay for a school breakfast or a school lunch or whose school breakfast or school lunch bill is in arrears. (For example, by requiring the student to sit at a separate table or by requiring that the student wear a wristband, hand stamp, or identifying mark, or by serving the student an alternative meal);
2. Require an unsubsidized student, who cannot pay for a school breakfast or a school lunch or whose school breakfast or school lunch bill is in arrears to do chores or other work to pay for the school breakfast or school lunch;
3. Require an unsubsidized student to discard a school breakfast or school lunch after it has been served because of the student’s inability to pay for a school breakfast or school lunch or because money is owed for previously provided meals;
4. Prohibit an unsubsidized student, or sibling of such a student, from attending or participating in non-fee-based extracurricular activities, field trips, or school events, from receiving grades, official transcripts, or report cards, or from graduating or attending graduation events, solely because of the student’s unresolved meal debt; or
5. Require the parent of an unsubsidized student to pay fees or costs in excess of the actual amounts owed for meals previously served to the student.

If an unsubsidized student owes money for the equivalent of five or more school meals, the Principal or designee shall:

1. Determine whether the student is categorically eligible or income-eligible for free or reduced price meals, by conducting a review of all available records related to the student, and by making at least two attempts, not including the initial attempt made pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21.c.(2), to contact the student’s parent and have the parent fill out a school meals application; and
2. Contact the parent of the unsubsidized student to offer assistance with respect to the completion of the school meals application; and to determine if there are other issues in the household that have caused the student to have insufficient funds to purchase a school breakfast or school lunch; and to offer any other appropriate assistance.

The school district shall direct communications about a student’s school breakfast or school lunch bill being in arrears to the parent and not to the student. Nothing in N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21 shall prohibit the school district from sending a student home with a letter addressed to a parent.

Notwithstanding the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21 and the provisions of any other law, rule, or regulation to the contrary, an unsubsidized student shall not be denied access to a school meal, regardless of the student’s ability to pay or the status of the student’s meal arrearages, during any period of time in which the school is making a determination, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21.c., as to whether the student is eligible for, and can be certified to receive, free or reduced price meals.

If the student’s meal bill is in arrears, but the student has the money to purchase a meal on a subsequent school day, the student will be provided a meal with payment and the food service program will not use the student’s payment to repay previously unpaid charges if the student intended to use the money to purchase that school day’s meal.

Students receiving free meals will not be denied a meal even if they accrued a negative balance from other purchases in the cafeteria.

The school district may post this Policy on the school district’s website provided there is a method in place to ensure this Policy reaches all households without access to a computer or the Internet.

The district's liaison for the education of homeless children shall coordinate with district personnel to ensure that a homeless student receives free school meals and is monitored according to district policies pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21c.

G. Provision of School Meals During Period of School Closure – N.J.S.A. 18A:33-27.2

In the event the Board is provided a written directive, by either the New Jersey Department of Health or the health officer of the jurisdiction, to institute a public health-related closure due to the COVID-19 epidemic, the district shall implement a program, during the period of the school closure, to provide school meals, at meal distribution sites designated pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-27.2.b., to all students enrolled in the district who are either categorically eligible or income-eligible for free or reduced price school meals.

In the event of an emergency closure, as described in N.J.S.A. 18A:33-27.2.a., the district shall identify one or more school meal distribution sites that are walkable and easily accessible to students in the district. The district shall collaborate with county and municipal government officials in identifying appropriate sites. A school meals distribution site may include, but need not be limited to: faith-based locations; community centers, such as YMCAs; and locations in the district where meals are made available through a summer meals program. In a district that includes high density housing, the district shall make every effort to identify a school meal distribution site in that housing area.

The district shall identify students enrolled in the district who are categorically eligible or income-eligible for free or reduced price meals, and for whom a school meal distribution site, identified pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-27.2.b., is not within walking distance. In the case of these students, the district shall distribute the school meals to the student's residence or to the student's bus stop along an established bus route, provided that the student or the student's parent is present at the bus stop for the distribution. Food distributed pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-27.2.c. may include up to a total of three school days' worth of food per delivery.

The district may use school buses owned and operated by the district to distribute school meals pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-27.2. If the district does not own and operate its own buses, the district may contract for the distribution of school meals, and these contracts shall not be subject to the public bidding requirements established pursuant to the "Public School Contracts Law," N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-1 et seq.

The district shall collaborate, as feasible, with other districts and with local government units to implement the emergency meals distribution program, as required by N.J.S.A. 18A:33-27.2, in order to promote administrative and operational efficiencies and cost savings.

School lunches and breakfasts that are made available, through an emergency meals distribution program operating pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-27.2, shall be provided to eligible students, free of charge, in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:33-4.a. and N.J.S.A. 18A:33-14a.

H. Statement of Compliance

All food service programs shall be operated pursuant to 7 CFR 245, as appropriate, and this Policy.

N.J.S.A. 18A:18A-42.1; 18A:33-4; 18A:33-5; 18A:33-10;
18A:33-10.1; 18A:33-11; 18A:33-11.1; 18A:33-11.2;
18A:33-11.3; 18A:33-14a.; 18A:33-21; 18A:33-21a.;
18A:33-21b1; 18A:33-21c.; 18A:33-23; 18A:33-24;
18A:33-25; 18A:33-26; 18A:33-27.2; 18A:58-7.1;
18A:58-7.2
N.J.A.C. 2:36
N.J.A.C. 6A:23-2.6 et seq.
N.J.A.C. 8:24-2.1 through 7.5
7 C.F.R. 210.1 et seq.

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