

**Georgia Department of Education
School Nutrition Program
1562 Twin Towers East
Atlanta, Georgia 30334**

POLICY STATEMENT

FREE AND REDUCED PRICE MEALS

SCHOOL YEAR 2021-2022

KEEP THIS BOOKLET ON FILE

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- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
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- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

INTRODUCTION

All schools participating in the federally assisted National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program must make these benefits available to eligible children each year. The Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) annually issues this Free and Reduced Price Policy Statement to all school food authorities (SFAs) to assist in the correct implementation of these program requirements.

Each participating SFA must adopt and implement the Free and Reduced Price Policy Statement. The policy statement or addendum and attachments, along with any modifications, must be approved by the GaDOE by October 15 of each year for the SFA to continue to receive State and Federal reimbursement.

The Free and Reduced Price Policy Statement consists of:

1. SFA Agreement to Implement (School Nutrition Online [SNO] SFA Sign-off)
2. Policy Statement
3. USDA Income Eligibility Guidelines
4. Application and verification procedures
5. Meal application with instructions and parent letters (English and Spanish)
6. Notification to direct certification households and procedures
7. Confidentiality memorandum
8. Media release
9. Meal accountability and collection procedures
10. Verification attachments
11. Civil Rights compliance requirements
12. Special Assistance Alternatives Provision 2 Assurances
13. Community Eligibility Provision Assurances
14. Meal Supplement for Afterschool Care Program Assurances
15. On-site review forms for Breakfast, Lunch, and Afterschool Snack
16. Edit check forms
17. Seamless Summer Option review form
18. Spanish translation of the Free and Reduced Price Meal Application

POLICY TERMS

The School Food Authority (SFA) assures the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) that the school system will uniformly implement the following policy to determine children's eligibility for free and reduced price meals in all child nutrition programs under its jurisdiction. In fulfilling its responsibilities, the SFA:

- A. agrees to serve meals free to children from families whose income is at or below that listed in the Income Eligibility Guidelines (Attachment A);
- B. agrees to serve meals at the reduced price of not more than 40 cents for lunch and 30 cents for breakfast to children from families whose income is at or below that listed in the Income Eligibility Guidelines;
- C. agrees to provide these benefits to children from families experiencing unemployment which causes the family income to fall within the criteria specified in the Income Eligibility Guidelines;
- D. agrees that there will be no physical segregation of, or any other discrimination against, any child because of inability to pay the full price of the meal. The names of 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 or tickets or by any other means. Further assurance is given that children eligible for free or reduced price meals shall not be required to:
 - 1. work for their meals,
 - 2. use a separate dining room or separate area of the dining room,
 - 3. go through a separate serving line,
 - 4. enter the dining room through a separate entrance,
 - 5. eat meals at a different time, or
 - 6. eat a different meal from the meal sold to children paying the full price;
- E. agrees that in the operation of child nutrition programs, no child shall be discriminated against because of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability, and;
- F. agrees to establish and use a fair hearing procedure in cases of appeal by parents of the school's decisions on applications and for school officials' challenges to the correctness of information contained in an application or of the continued eligibility of any child for free or reduced price meals. During the appeal and hearing, the child will continue to receive free or reduced price meals.

A record of all such appeals and challenges and their dispositions shall be retained for five years after the end of the fiscal year to which they pertain.

Prior to initiating the hearing procedure, the parent or local school official may request a conference to provide an opportunity for the parent and school official to discuss the situation, present information, and obtain an explanation of data submitted in the application and decisions rendered. Such a conference shall not in any way prejudice or diminish the right to a fair hearing.

The hearing procedure shall provide:

1. a publicly announced, simple method for making an oral or written request for a hearing,
2. an opportunity to be assisted or represented by an attorney or other person,
3. an opportunity to examine, prior to and during the hearing, the documents and records presented to support the decision under appeal,
4. that the hearing shall be held with reasonable promptness and convenience and that adequate notice shall be given as to the time and place of the hearing,
5. an opportunity to present oral or documentary evidence and arguments supporting a position without undue interference,
6. an opportunity to question or refute any testimony or other evidence and confront and cross-examine any adverse witness,
7. that the hearing shall be conducted, and the decision made by a hearing official who did not participate in the decision under appeal, or any previous conference,
8. that the decision of the hearing official shall be based on the oral and documentary evidence presented at the hearing and made a part of the hearing record,
9. that the parties concerned, and any designated representative thereof shall be notified in writing of the decision of the hearing official,
10. that a written record shall be prepared with respect to each hearing. This record shall include the decision under appeal; any documentary evidence and a summary of any oral testimony presented at the hearing; the decision of the hearing official, including the reasons therefore and a copy of the notification to the parties concerned of the hearing official's decisions, and

11. that such written record of each hearing shall be preserved for a period of five years after the end of the fiscal year to which it pertains and shall be available for examination by the parties concerned or their representatives at any reasonable time and place during such period;
- G. agrees to designate a determining official to review applications and make determinations of eligibility. In accordance with State Rule 160-5-6-.01 STATEWIDE SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM, this responsibility must be assigned to School Nutrition personnel. This official will use the criteria outlined in this policy to determine which individual children are eligible for free or reduced price meals;
- H. agrees to develop and send to each child's parent or guardian a letter including an application form for free and reduced price meals at the beginning of each school year and whenever there is a change in eligibility criteria, unless specifically exempted from doing so (Attachments B, C, and D).

Parents will be requested to complete the application and return it to the school. Such applications and documentation of action taken will be maintained for five years after the fiscal year to which they pertain or according to the system's records retention schedule, whichever is longer. If audit findings have not been resolved, the records shall be retained beyond the five-year period as long as required for the resolution of issues raised by the audit.

Applications may be filed at any time during the year and any parent enrolling a child in a school for the first time, at any time during the year, shall be supplied with such documents.

If a child transfers from one school to another under the jurisdiction of the same SFA, his/her eligibility for free or reduced price meals will be transferred to and honored by the receiving school. The original application will be on file in the school the child currently attends, and a copy of the application will be available at schools formerly attended unless the applications are filed centrally.

All children from a household will receive the same benefits based on income information or categorically if the household receives SNAP or TANF benefits. For households with both foster children and non-foster children, the foster child is included as a household member and any personal use income received by the foster child is reportable. Parents or guardians will be notified, within 10 working days, of the acceptance or denial of their applications. Children will be served meals at the free or reduced price immediately upon their establishment of the eligibility. When an application is rejected, parents or guardians will be provided written notification with information as specified in the Notification of Eligibility Determination Letters. (Attachments D, E, and F);

- I. agrees to designate a hearing official to establish and use a fair hearing procedure as described in F. above.

(Note: This person must be someone not involved in the original eligibility determination or the verification. It is suggested the hearing official be someone who holds a position superior to that of the determining or verification official.);

- J. agrees to provide to local grassroots organizations and major employers contemplating or experiencing large layoffs, a public release containing the same information outlined in the parent letter at the beginning of the school year. In addition, agrees to provide such public release whenever there is a change in eligibility criteria, unless specifically exempted from doing so. The State Agency will provide the public release to news media throughout the state at the beginning of the school year (Attachment M);
- K. agrees to participate in the statewide direct certification process, according to procedures developed annually by the GaDOE;
- L. agrees to implement Meal Accountability Procedures which conform to the criteria for a model meal count system as described in the State Prototype Meal Accountability Procedure (Attachment K);
- M. agrees to submit to the GaDOE any alteration or amendments to the policy, including eligibility criteria, applications, public announcements, collection procedures, etc., for approval prior to implementation. Such changes will be effective only upon approval;
- N. agrees to select and verify, by November 15, the eligibility of a sample of the approved free and reduced price applications on file as of October 1. Verification will be achieved using the designated method (Attachment L);
- O. agrees to maintain for a period of at least five years a description of verification efforts, including:
 - 1. A summary of the verification efforts including the selection process;
 - 2. The total number of applications on file on October 1; and
 - 3. The percentage or number of applications that are/will be verified by November 15;
- P. agrees to designate School Nutrition Program (SNP) staff members for the following functions:
 - 1. Verification official to coordinate all system verification activities
 - 2. Confirming official to certify verification documentation (a person other than the determining official)

3. Follow-up official to conduct any follow up of application verification;
- Q. agrees to provide results of verification process to GaDOE by the last day of school in December or other date as announced;
- R. agrees to assign to SNP personnel primary responsibilities for the following functions:
1. Collecting cash for meals served to students
 2. Counting meals served for the purpose of filing reimbursement claims
 3. Processing applications for approval and denial of free and reduced price meals
 4. Maintaining a current student eligibility list
 5. Verifying free and reduced price meal applications;
- S. agrees to establish a procedure to collect money from children who pay for their meals and to account for the number of free, reduced price, and full price meals served. The procedure(s) will be used so that no other child in the school will consciously be made aware by such procedure of the identity of the children receiving reduced price meals or free meals. See the Collection and Service Procedures (Attachment J);
- T. agrees that information on the application will be used to determine the child's eligibility for only those benefits allowed by law or designated by the parent/guardian;
- U. agrees to perform edits of all meal counts in accordance with 7 CFR 210.8(a)(2), as instructed on the Number of Lunches Served Daily (DE Form 0118) or alternate form;
- V. agrees not to deny meals to any enrolled student as a disciplinary measure while the student is in attendance at school;
- W. agrees to establish a provision that complies with the policy for replacement of lost and/or stolen tickets (FNS Instruction 765-7 Rev. 2, 1988 Handling Lost, Stolen and Misused Meal Tickets). See the Collection and Service Procedures (Attachment J);
- X. agrees a foster child is categorically eligible for free meals and may be included as a member of the foster family if the foster family chooses to also apply for benefits for other children and provides an explanation that including children in foster care as household members can help other children in the household qualify for free or reduced price meals. If the foster family is not eligible for free or reduced price meal benefits, it does not prevent a foster child from receiving free meal benefits;
- Y. agrees to instruct households with children who are categorically eligible under Other Source Categorically Eligible Programs to contact the school for assistance in receiving benefits and indicate the source of their status by checking the relevant box on the application;

- Z. agrees to ensure there are no barriers for participation in the Programs for Limited English Proficient (LEP) families and to communicate with parents and guardians in a language they can understand throughout the certification and verification processes (Attachment N);
- AA. agrees to provide a description of how the cafeteria and meal service prevents overt identification of the children receiving free or reduced price meals or free milk when competitive foods are being sold;
- BB. agrees to provide a statement of the measures the LEA has taken to prevent disclosure of confidential free and reduced price eligibility information as required under 7 CFR 245.6(f-k).