



School Meal Charge Policies in Maryland: Best Practices for Preventing School Meal Debt



Maryland Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger and promoting well-being

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About Maryland Hunger Solutions

Maryland Hunger Solutions, founded in 2007 by the Food Research & Action Center, works to end hunger and improve the nutrition, health, and well-being of individuals, children, and families in Maryland. Maryland Hunger Solutions uses a three-pronged strategy to:

- provide education about the stark reality of hunger's existence in Maryland and the proven solutions to reduce food insecurity;
- improve public policies to end food insecurity and poverty; and
- ensure that all eligible residents are connected to federal and state nutrition programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (known as the Food Supplement Program in Maryland) and school meals programs.

Introduction

During the 2018–2019 school year, over 900,000 children attended one of the more than 1,400 public schools throughout Maryland’s 24 public school systems. Across the state, these schools served a combined average of over 240,000 breakfasts and 405,000 lunches to students every school day through the School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program.

The School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program are instrumental in guaranteeing that students have access to the nutrition they need to learn and thrive. These programs provide schools with federal funding that allows them to serve healthy meals during the school day at no or low cost, ensuring that students are not distracted by hunger. Students may qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on their household income. In the 2018–2019 school year, over 333,000 students in Maryland were eligible to receive free school meals, and over 51,000 were eligible to receive school meals at a reduced price. However, these numbers represent only a portion of the students who rely on school meals every day to help meet their nutritional needs.

When a student who is required to pay the full or reduced cost of their meal arrives in the cafeteria without funds to purchase their meal, they start to accrue school meal debt. School meal debt is a growing challenge among school districts nationwide, including among many school districts in Maryland. In response to this challenge, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) required all school districts that serve meals through the School Breakfast Program, National School Lunch Program, or both to establish and clearly communicate a local meal charge policy by July 1, 2017. USDA has issued guidance on developing strong policies, but there are no federal requirements for what must be included in the policy, nor are there baseline protections for children and families. USDA also gave states the option to create a cohesive statewide policy, and while a number of states have created one, Maryland has not yet done so. This leaves individual districts responsible for creating fair and effective policies that protect students from shame and stigmatization.

About this Report

This report looks at meal charge policies in 21 out of Maryland’s 24 school districts for school year 2018–2019, and makes recommendations on best practices for preventing and responding to the issue of school meal debt while considering the impact on children and families. The three districts not included in the findings of this report are Baltimore City, Dorchester County, and Somerset County. These districts

use the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) districtwide to provide school meals at no charge to all of their students, effectively eliminating school meal debt and the need for a meal charge policy.

School systems that are not using CEP districtwide can strengthen their nutrition programs while preserving the dignity of the

children and families they serve by implementing the following measures:

- ensure that all eligible students are certified for free or reduced-price meals;
- prevent the accumulation of debt by providing meals at no cost to all students when possible or waiving the reduced-price copay for students in the reduced-price category;
- abolish harmful practices that shame, stigmatize, or otherwise punish students for a lack of money; and

- establish a system that quickly and appropriately responds to school meal debt as it occurs.

By enacting effective meal charge policies, school districts in Maryland can ensure that the cafeteria is a positive and supportive environment for all students, and that the children of Maryland receive the nutritional support they need with the compassion and dignity they deserve.

How School Meal Programs Work

Who Operates School Meal Programs?

The School Breakfast Program and National School Lunch Program are administered by USDA at the federal level and through the Maryland State Department of Education in Maryland. Any public school, nonprofit private school, or residential child care institution can participate in either or both of these programs, and any student attending a school that offers either or both of these programs can eat breakfast, lunch, or both meals.

How are School Districts Reimbursed?

Schools that serve meals are reimbursed by the federal government at set rates depending on whether a student is receiving free, reduced-price, or paid meals. Under federal guidelines, students certified for reduced-price meals can be charged a maximum of \$0.30 for breakfast and \$0.40 for lunch, and those who are not certified for free or reduced-price school meals generally are charged the cost of their meal as set by the school district, minus a small federal reimbursement.

For the 2018–2019 school year, schools received

the following federal reimbursements for school meals:

- \$1.79 per free breakfast and \$3.31 per free lunch;
- \$1.49 per reduced-price breakfast and \$2.91 per reduced-price lunch; and
- \$0.31 per “paid” breakfast and \$0.31 per “paid” lunch.

In school year 2019–2020, Maryland will begin to phase out the reduced-price copay as required by the Maryland Cares for Kids Act of 2018. In accordance with this law, the state will be responsible for covering \$0.10 of every reduced-price meal served in school year 2019–2020. The amount that the state pays will increase by \$0.10 every year until the reduced-price copay is eliminated, which will be in school year 2021–2022 for breakfast, and school year 2022–2023 for lunch.

How are Students Certified for Free and Reduced-Price Meals?

Most children are certified for free or reduced-price meals via applications collected by the school district at the beginning of the school

year or during the school year. However, children in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), as well as foster youth, migrant, homeless, or runaway youth, and Head Start participants are “categorically eligible” (automatically eligible) for free school meals and can be certified without submitting a school meal application.

School districts are required to “directly certify” children in households participating in SNAP for free school meals through data-matching of SNAP records with school enrollment lists. School districts also have the option of directly certifying other categorically eligible children and can coordinate with personnel such as the school district’s homeless and migrant education liaisons to obtain documentation to certify children for free school meals. Some

categorically eligible children may be missed in this process, requiring the household to submit a school meals application; however, these households are not required to complete the income information section of the application.

High-poverty schools in which 40 percent or more of students are directly certified for free meals may opt to use CEP to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students. Under CEP, schools do not have to collect or process school meal applications, or track meals served based on payment category. Instead, school meals are served at no cost to all students, and schools are reimbursed using a formula that is based on their direct certification percentage and a multiplier of 1.6. This multiplier accounts for the additional students in the school who would have been certified for free and reduced-price school meals through the traditional school meals application process.

What is School Meal Debt?

School meal debt begins to accrue when a student arrives to the cafeteria without the funds necessary to cover the cost of their meal. In some cases, this may indicate a change in household income status. It may indicate that the family is struggling financially even if they are just above the cutoff line for free or reduced-price school meals, which especially can happen to families in states such as Maryland, where the cost of living is high. Or it could be a misunderstanding of school meal procedures by the school staff or by parents or guardians.

How Does This Lead to Shaming?

School districts are responsible for establishing

procedures and clearly communicating them to parents, teachers, and school staff in order to respond appropriately when students arrive in the cafeteria without the funds to purchase their meal. Recently, schools across the country that employ or have considered employing harsh practices intended to shame, stigmatize, or otherwise punish students who cannot pay for their meals have been thrust into the national spotlight. Some of the most common punishments meted out against students include throwing away hot meals that had already been served to students, serving cold cheese sandwiches (often referred to as the “shame sandwich”) as an alternative meal, and

marking students with stamps or wristbands to indicate their lack of money.

How Does This Impact Maryland School Districts?

A recent [School Nutrition Association report](#) has shown that across the country, 3 out of 4 schools had meal debt in school year 2017–2018. Maryland schools are no exception. During the 2018–2019 school year, the amount of debt accrued by Maryland school districts ranged from \$3,000 to almost \$100,000. Under federal law, any school meal debt that cannot be recovered from families is classified as "bad

debt" and must be covered by a nonfederal funding source.

Schools participating in CEP offer meals at no charge to all students, so those schools are not impacted by unpaid school meal fees. As of school year 2018–2019, 232 schools in Maryland use CEP to offer meals at no charge to all students, including the entire districts of Baltimore City, Dorchester County, and Somerset County. At the conclusion of the 2018–2019 school year, 58 additional high-poverty schools were eligible to implement CEP.

Addressing School Meal Debt

The passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 required USDA to examine the need for national standards for unpaid school meal charges policies. Following this requirement, USDA solicited public input through a Request for Comments, hosted a series of webinars, and examined state and school district policies in place at the time. As a result, USDA required that all school districts establish a policy by July 1, 2017, and to clearly communicate that policy to households at least once per year.

Federal Guidance

Although USDA does not require what must be included in a policy or any specific practices, they published [Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools](#), as well as several other resources, as a way to promote best practices in school meal charge policy creation. Examples of strategies that were suggested by USDA include: taking steps to ensure that all students who are



eligible for free or reduced-price school meals are certified to receive them, such as strengthening the direct certification process and providing free and reduced-price meal application assistance; implementing policies that avoid student distress and stigmatization; responding quickly with discreet communications to parents and guardians when students begin to accrue school meal debt; and offering to work with families to create repayment plans that fit their needs and financial situations.

State Guidance

Under USDA regulations, states can establish statewide policies aimed at eliminating shame and providing nutritious, reimbursable meals to all students, regardless of their ability to pay. While some states have done this through their

stage agency, others have enacted legislation to create rules that address various elements of school meal debt, including abolishing shaming practices, establishing prevention methods (such as connecting eligible households to free and reduced-price meals), communicating these policies to households, and other practices that are intended to reduce school meal debt and the stigma associated with it. A number of states have statewide meal charge policies that address meal shaming, including: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Texas, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

Currently, Maryland does not have any statewide policy requirements, nor are school districts required by the state to include any best practices in their individual policies.

School Meal Charge Policy Findings

Communication of Policies

USDA's policy guidance required all school districts to establish a clearly communicated meal charge policy by July 1, 2017. USDA's

[Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A](#)

provides more detail for this requirement by including a mandate for each school district to distribute its policy in writing to all households at the beginning of every school year and to new

Resources from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Food Research & Action Center

USDA policy resources:

- [Unpaid Meal Charges Webpage](#)
- [Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A](#)
- [Preventing Lunch Shaming: Communication Strategies](#)
- [Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools](#)

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) has created several resources that school districts can use to strengthen their policies.

- [Establishing Unpaid Meal Fee Policies: Best Practices to Ensure Access and Prevent Stigma](#)
- [Best Practices for Preventing or Reducing School Meal Debt](#)

households coming into the system during the school year. This could include adding the policy to existing printed materials, such as student handbooks, menus, or the free and reduced-price meal application. However, while posting the policy on the school district's website is considered to be helpful, it does not fulfill the communication requirement under USDA guidelines.

As of spring 2019, this report finds that among Maryland's 21 public school districts that require a meal charge policy,

- 18 had a written policy that could be accessed online or through a request to the district's food and nutrition services department;
- 14 published their policy in an alternative location, such as a parent or student handbook, school board policy manual, or school cafeteria menu.
- 11 are in compliance with the federal requirement to communicate this policy to families once per year;
- 10 made their policy available on the school district's website; and

(Baltimore City, Dorchester County, and Somerset County are exempt from establishing a policy due to their districtwide implementation of CEP.)

See the appendix for a chart showing the methods used to communicate their meal charge policy.

While the majority of Maryland district policies are publicly available, many were challenging to locate. Several districts posted different versions of their policies in multiple locations,

**Methods of Policy
Communication Used by
Maryland School Districts**

18/21

school district have a written policy

14/21

**school districts included their
policy in alternative location (e.g.,
student handbook, school board
manual)**

11/21

**school districts distribute their
policy to households annually**

10/21

**school districts post their policies
on their Food and Nutrition Services
website**

indicating a need for improved transparency and uniformity. In addition, conversations with school food and nutrition service departments in some cases revealed a lack of awareness regarding this policy, which presents an opportunity for more frequent and comprehensive policy training.

Policy Content

Maryland policies vary significantly in content and level of protection against meal shaming. While measures to protect and provide for

students who cannot pay for their meals can have unintended negative impacts on school finances, policies that do not provide these protections often result in students shouldering the

consequences of meal debt. Many Maryland policies guarantee some level of protection for students; however, many harmful practices also can be found among Maryland school districts.

Number of Maryland Districts that Include Measures that May Lead to Stigma in their School Meal Charge Policies

14

serve alternative meals to students after a predetermined charging limit has been reached;

3

explicitly allow the identification of students with pink slips, stickers, or notes from the cashier;

9

allow communication about account balances, debt, and repayment to be directed at students instead of only at parents or adults in the household;

3

punish student by restricting participation in extracurricular activities or barring access to student records and report cards; and

8

treat students differently based on age (i.e., allowing elementary school students to charge meals but not high school students.);

2

use debt collection agencies to recover unpaid meal debt.

Although these harmful practices can be found among a significant number of the policies in Maryland, many school districts have taken steps

to prevent school meal debt from accumulating and eliminate stigma in the cafeteria.

Number of Maryland Districts that Include Measures for Preventing Debt and Reducing Stigma in their School Meal Charge Policies

15

allow all students to charge up to a set amount of reimbursable meals in the event that they do not have funds to purchase a meal;

7

notify parents or households of low balances before debt accumulates;

10

encourage families to prevent current and future meal charges by applying for free or reduced-price meals;

3

include assurances that students without money to pay for their meals will be treated with dignity and compassion; and

8

work with households and take into account individual circumstance during the meal charge repayment process;

2

include plans for providing their meal charge policy to school staff.

School Meal Debt Policy Best Practices

Establishing and implementing a policy that effectively and fairly responds to situations where students do not have enough money to pay for their school meal can be a challenge for school districts, but it's important to adopt. Measures put in place to protect students do result in accumulation of school meal debt that school systems must then attempt to collect. Under federal law, any school meal debt that cannot be recovered from families must be written off as bad debt, and the school district must cover this cost with nonfederal funds, meaning that they must find these funds from outside of the school meals programs. This money is often taken out of the school district's general fund. Occasionally, schools have relied on crowdfunding or private donations to cover the cost of bad debt from unpaid meal fees. While well intentioned, these short-term solutions are not sustainable and rely on isolated cases of charity to protect students and support school meal programs. Instead, school districts should focus on creating effective policies that prioritize feeding children and include best practices for preventing school meal debt.

Policy Recommendations for Preventing School Meal Debt

Offer School Meals at No Cost to All Students:

Offering school meals at no cost to all students removes the opportunity for school meal debt to accumulate. There are several methods for schools with significant numbers of low-income students to offer meals at no cost. Not only will

this eliminate meal debt, it will increase access to healthy meals and increase participation, which will bring additional federal reimbursement dollars into schools.

- **Community Eligibility Provision:** This provision allows high-poverty schools, districts, or a group of schools within a district to offer meals at no charge to all students. Those with 40 percent or more “identified students” — students automatically eligible for free school meals who are identified as such by means other than an individual household application, such as by direct certification based on their SNAP eligibility — are able to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students. Under CEP, schools do not have to collect or process school meal applications, or track meals served based on payment category.¹
- **Provision 2:** This provision allows schools to serve only breakfast, only lunch, or both breakfast and lunch, to all students at no charge. Schools using Provision 2 collect school meal applications and count and claim meals by fee category during year one of a four-year cycle, called the “base year.” Participation in the first year determines the percentage of meals that will be reimbursed at the free, reduced-price, or paid rate for the remaining three years in the cycle.
- **Nonpricing:** No fees are collected from students; however, the school does not receive any additional federal funds aside from the standard reimbursement.²

¹ “Identified student” populations include children in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), as well as youth in foster care, migrant, homeless, or runaway youth, and Head Start participants.

² School Lunch Equity requires that school district set paid school lunch fees comparable to the federal free reimbursement rate. Districts that charge less (or do not charge) are required to cover those costs with non-federal funds. The Fiscal Year 2019 appropriations bill limited this requirement to school districts with a negative fund balance for the 2019-2020 school year.

- Maryland Meals for Achievement: This program provides state funding to supplement federal meal reimbursements so that high poverty schools can offer breakfast in the classroom to all students at no charge. A school can apply when at least 40 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

Certify Every Eligible Student for Free or Reduced-Price Meals:

Families that are eligible for free or reduced-price meals often struggle to make ends meet. By taking steps to certify all eligible students, schools can ensure that these children are able to access the meals they need without the stress of accruing school meal debt that neither their families nor the school district can afford. There are several steps that schools can take to certify eligible students more effectively:

- improve direct certification systems and data-sharing with other community programs or individuals, e.g., the school district's local homeless liaison;
- ensure applications are accessible and available in multiple languages;
- conduct outreach throughout the year and encourage families to apply at any time of the year, not just at the start of the school year;
- carry over eligibility from the previous school year until a new determination can be made; and
- accept certification from students transferring in from other districts.

Eliminate the Reduced-Price Copay

School districts that determine it is not financially feasible to provide meals at no cost to all students can consider picking up the cost of the reduced-price copay for breakfast, lunch, or both meals. The children who qualify for reduced-price meals are often from families that are struggling

School Districts Using the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) to Provide School Meals at no Cost to all Students in the 2018–2019 school year

CEP

- Allegany (4 schools)
- Baltimore City (district-wide)
- Baltimore County (4 schools)
- Cecil (4 schools)
- Dorchester (district-wide)
- Frederick (3 schools)
- Garrett (1 school)
- Howard (2 schools)
- Prince George's (11 schools)
- Somerset (district-wide)
- Washington (11 schools)
- Wicomico (8 schools)

MMFA

- Allegany (10 schools)
- Anne Arundel (47 schools)
- Baltimore County (80 schools)
- Caroline (11 schools)
- Carroll (4 schools)
- Cecil (15 schools)
- Charles (14 schools)
- Dorchester (8 schools)
- Frederick (14 schools)
- Garrett (8 schools)
- Harford (14 schools)
- Howard (17 schools)
- Kent (4 schools)
- Montgomery (83 schools)
- Prince George's (84 schools)
- Queen Anne's (3 schools)
- Somerset (5 schools)
- St. Mary's (9 schools)
- Talbot (5 schools)
- Washington (26 schools)
- Wicomico (14 schools)
- Worcester (6 schools)

financially. By eliminating this copay, these students and their families are more likely to remain free from school meal debt.

The Maryland Cares for Kids Act of 2018 will phase out the reduced-price copay for school breakfast and lunch in the state over the next four years. Once the reduced-price copay is eliminated for both school breakfast and school

lunch in 2023, all 51,000 students in Maryland who are eligible for reduced-price meals will receive their school meals at no cost. While the state is only required to waive a portion of the reduced-price copay over the next four-year phase out period, districts can and should consider using district funding to waive the full copay to ensure these students remain free from debt during this transition.

Best Practices Found In Maryland School District Policies

Certify Every Eligible Student for Free or Reduced-Price Meals:

"In certain circumstances an administrator can complete a FARM application on behalf of the child based on household size and income information or Other Source Categorical Eligibility status known to the administrator. The FNS will notify the household that their child has been certified to receive free or reduced price benefits. The source of information used by the administrator must be noted on the application." ¹ (Frederick County)

"Families may apply for free/reduced meals anytime during the year. Applications shall be sent to all students at the beginning of the school year. In addition, applications shall be available at the Central office, all school offices, the cafeteria during meal service, and online." ² (Worcester County)

Policy Recommendations for Eliminating Shame

Practices that shame or stigmatize can have a lasting impact on a student's mental health and well-being. In order to avoid any emotional and mental distress to the student, the following practices should be included in school meal charge policies:

Prohibit punishments:

Students should not be punished for their

families' inability to pay for their school meal. Punitive actions that should be prohibited include requiring the student to perform chores to pay off debt, preventing students with debt from participating in school-sponsored extracurricular activities or social events, and barring students from graduating or accessing report cards, diplomas, or their academic records.

¹ Frederick County Public Schools Food & Nutrition Services (FNS), Standard Operating Procedures, "[Unpaid Meals \(Charging\)](#)," Accessed June 24, 2019.

² Worcester County Public Schools, "[Unpaid School Meal Charges Policy](#)," Accessed June 24, 2019.

Eliminate stigmatizing practices:

Shame occurs when students are overtly identified for not being able to pay for their school meal. Schools should avoid actions that cause unnecessary distress for students, including taking the meal away after it was served, identifying students' inability to pay in front of their peers, marking or stamping children, or requiring that children be served a different meal or eat in a separate location.

Meal Charging:

To avoid hunger during the day, schools should consider allowing students to charge meals regardless of their grade level or ability to pay.

Alternative Meal Standards:

Districts that choose to provide lower-cost alternatives to students who cannot pay should ensure these meals still meet federal nutrition guidelines. These meals should be an option for all students to select in the cafeteria line.

Best Practices Found In Maryland School District Policies

Eliminating stigma

"PGCPS intends to treat all students with dignity and respect and prevent any embarrassment in the lunch line due to lack of funds in a student's meal account while promoting parental responsibility for meal payment."¹ (Prince George's County)

"All students will be treated with dignity and confidentiality in the serving line regarding meal accounts...No student will be denied a meal because of financial circumstances beyond a student's control. Meals will not be taken away from a student once it is served."² (Howard County)

Meal Charging

"Every student is served a meal, regardless of eligibility status or charges on account. Alternate meals are not to be served to students. Food and Nutrition Services' (FNS) goal is to provide students the nutrition they need, minimize the identification of students with insufficient funds, and maintain financial integrity of the enterprise fund."³ (Washington County)

Alternative meal standards

"Students who have unpaid meal charges after the grace period, will thereafter, be offered an alternative meal that meets the USDA guidelines."⁴ (Wicomico County)

¹ Prince George's County Public Schools, "[Parental Notification for Students without Funds for School Meals](#)," Accessed June 24, 2019.

² Howard County Public School System, "[Policy 4200 Implementation Procedures- Meal Charges](#)," Accessed June 24, 2019.

³ Washington County Public Schools, 2019-2020 Handbook & Guide, "[Charge Regulations](#)," Accessed October 7, 2019.

⁴ Wicomico County Board of Education, "[Unpaid School Meal Charges Policy](#)," Accessed June 24, 2019.

Policy Recommendations for Responding to Debt

The best approach to addressing unpaid school meal fees is to establish and enforce the preventive measures outlined in the previous sections of this report. By ensuring that these best practices are in place, schools can help guarantee that cafeterias remain shame- and stigma-free for students while also helping families to remain free of school meal debt. In the event that a student begins charging meals, schools have the responsibility to respond quickly and compassionately to avoid accruing further debt and creating or fostering stigma.

In response to meal charges, schools should begin by making attempts to determine whether a student is eligible for free or reduced-price school meals because this is often the first

sign that a family may be struggling financially. If the student cannot be directly certified and is found to not be eligible for free or reduced-price meals, schools have the responsibility to contact, immediately, any family with a negative account balance. All communication about school meal debt should be directed to a parent or guardian, not the student.

In addition, schools should work with households that cannot afford to pay off all school meal debt at once to establish a payment plan. No collection methods should be used that require families to pay additional fees or interest in excess of the cost of the meals served, because doing so places an additional and unnecessary burden on families who are already struggling financially.

Best Practices Found In Maryland School District Policies

Schools should contact parents or guardians immediately of any negative balance and work to determine if the student is eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

“Parents will be notified via US Mail, telephone, secured electronic notice, or unmarked sealed envelope sent home with the student. This notification will also include information on how to apply for free or reduced meals.”¹ (**Worcester County**)

Communication about school meal debt should be directed at the student’s parent or guardian and not involve the student.

“Food and Nutrition Services will send out low balance notices prior to students needing to charge meals. School system staff involved in the collection of delinquent debt for meals will ensure that their efforts do not have a negative impact on the student involved, and will instead focus primarily on adults in the household responsible for providing funds for meal purchases.”² (**Howard County**)

“Staff must not overtly inform students of their low balance. Instead they need to make note of the student that needs a note home.”³ (**Caroline County**)

¹ Worcester County Public Schools, "[Unpaid School Meal Charges Policy](#)," Accessed June 24, 2019.

² Howard County Public School System, "[Policy 4200 Implementation Procedures- Meal Charges](#)," Accessed June 24, 2019.

³ Caroline County Public Schools Department of Food and Nutrition Services, Standard Operating Procedure, "[Meal Charges](#)," Accessed June 24, 2019.

Conclusion

As education stakeholders in Maryland continue to make efforts to improve the state's education system, it is crucial to include conversations about access to school meals that provide students with the nutrition they need to thrive in an academic environment. School meals are a key component to the success of Maryland's students both in and out of the classroom. Without strong policies in place, the

challenges of school meal debt and the associated stigma will continue to be stumbling blocks to children, families, and school nutrition departments across the state. By establishing effective and compassionate policies, Maryland schools can foster a supportive school environment for all students to learn and grow without shame.

Appendix

Methods for Communicating School Meal Charge Policy by School District, School Year 2018–2019

School District	School district has a written policy	Policy is distributed to households annually	Policy can be found on school district's website	Policy is included in an alternative location (e.g., student handbook, school board manual)
Allegeny County	✓	✓		✓
Anne Arundel County	✓	✓	✓	✓
Baltimore City*	NA	NA	NA	NA
Baltimore County	✓		✓	✓
Calvert County	✓	✓	✓	✓
Caroline County	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carroll County	✓	✓		
Cecil County				
Charles County	✓	✓	✓	✓
Dorchester County*	NA	NA	NA	NA
Frederick County	✓		✓	
Garrett County	✓	✓		✓
Harford County	✓	✓	✓	
Howard County	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kent County	✓			✓
Montgomery County				
Prince George's County	✓			✓
Queen Anne's County				
Somerset County*	NA	NA	NA	NA
St. Mary's County	✓	✓	✓	
Talbot County	✓			✓
Washington County	✓	✓		✓
Wicomico County	✓		✓	✓
Worcester County	✓			✓

*Baltimore City, Dorchester County, and Somerset County are not required to have meal charge policies because these districts use CEP to provide meals at no charge to all students.

**Food and Nutrition Services

Technical Notes

This report reflects the communication methods and content of written meal charge policies for Maryland school systems at the school district level. This report does not evaluate compliance or lack of compliance with these policies or actual practices of individual schools or school personnel.

School meal charge policies from individual school districts were collected between April and August 2019, through online searches, email requests, and direct communication with food and nutrition service department personnel. Policy content and location changes made after August 31, 2019, are not reflected in this report. The policy communication methods included may not reflect every location where policies can be found.

In alignment with USDA guidelines, this report does not recognize online communications, the presence of a URL link, or materials with a reference to a policy without the inclusion of policy content, as a method for clearly communicating policies to households. School districts were considered to be in compliance with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) requirement to communicate the policy to households once per year if it was included in other materials distributed in writing, including welcome packets, student or parent handbooks, existing notifications for free and reduced-price meals, and school menus. School districts in which individual schools chose to distribute written policies, but where it is not made a districtwide requirement, are not considered to be in compliance.

Nondiscrimination Statement

Maryland Hunger Solutions is a drug-free workplace that does not discriminate on the basis of age, ancestry, color, creed, gender identity and expression, genetic information, marital status, disability, national origin, race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, religious creed, disability, age, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or

have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: How to File a Complaint, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992.

Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
2. fax: (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



Maryland Hunger Solutions

Ending hunger and promoting well-being

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