

**Georgia Department of Education
School Nutrition Program
1662 Twin Towers East
Atlanta, Georgia 30334**

POLICY STATEMENT

**FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE MEALS
SCHOOL YEAR 2015-2016**

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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. a Certification of Acceptance form;
2. the Policy Statement;
3. the income eligibility guidelines as issued by USDA each year;
4. application and verification procedures;
5. prototype parent letters and applications with instructions;
6. direct certification attachments;
7. confidentiality memorandum;
8. public release;
9. meal accountability and collection procedures;
10. verification attachments;
11. civil rights compliance requirements;
12. assurances for Special Assistance Certification and Reimbursement Alternatives Provisions II and III, Community Eligibility Provision, and for the Meal Supplement for Afterschool Care Program;
13. on-site review forms;
14. edit check forms;
15. Seamless Summer Option;
16. Spanish translation of the Free and Reduced Price Meals 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

- 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 page 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.

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 school food authority, 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. Parents or guardians will be notified, within 10 working days, of the acceptance or denial of their applications. Children will be served meals 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..

- 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.
- 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 Procedures, pages.
- 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.
- 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 Georgia Department of Education by March 1 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.
- 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.
- X. 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 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 mark the relevant box on the application to indicate their status.
- 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.
- 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 describe the measures taken to prevent disclosure of confidential free and reduced-price eligibility information as required under 7 CFR 245.6(f-k)

Georgia Department of Education School Nutrition Program

FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE MEALS POLICY WORKSHEET **Free and Reduced-Price Meals Policy Statement** **School Year 2015-2016**

The governing body of this School Food Authority (SFA) accepts this Free and Reduced-Price Meals Policy Statement, including the Family Income Eligibility Criteria and all required attachments, as referred to or indicated below:

Item 1: GENERAL INFORMATION

A. NAME OF SCHOOL FOOD AUTHORITY: _____

B. NAME OF SCHOOL NUTRITION DIRECTOR/MANAGER: _____

C. Check all that apply:

- 1. School Breakfast Program*
- 2. National School Lunch Program**
 - a. Meal Supplement for Afterschool Care Program
 - b. Seamless Summer Option
 - c. Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

D. Indicate Operation Methods of the School Nutrition Programs checked above:

(Check all that apply)

Pricing Provision II Public Charter Private
 Non-Pricing Community Eligibility Provision RCCI Regular

** .40 Maximum Reduced-Price Lunch

* .30 Maximum Reduced-Price Breakfast

Item 2: COLLECTION AND SERVICE PROCEDURES

Collection methods will be the same as used in the 2014-2015 School Year.

Yes **No** **If no, complete section on next page.**

C. VERIFICATION OFFICIAL: _____

Address & Telephone _____

D. CONFIRMING OFFICIAL: _____

Address & Telephone _____

E. FOLLOW-UP OFFICIAL: _____

Address & Telephone _____

Item 4: MEAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURE (Check One)

_____ I certify that my system is using at a minimum the **STATE PROTOTYPE MEAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURE**

_____ Enclosed is my system **MEAL ACCOUNTABILITY PROCEDURE** for approval by the State Department of Education

Item 5: FREE AND REDUCED PARENT LETTER/APPLICATION

(Select the application/parent letter you are using)

_____ State Prototype Family instructions/application (Attachment B)

_____ State Prototype Family parent letter (Attachment B)

_____ Special Assistance Certification and Reimbursement Alternative II parent letter

_____ Alternate application

_____ Alternate parent letter

Item 6: VERIFICATION (Check Method Used)

__ Standard Sample __ Alternate-Random __ Alternate-Focused __ No Verification Performed

Item 7: ATTACHMENTS

The following attachments are adopted with and considered part of this policy statement:

- Income Eligibility Guidelines for Free and Reduced-Price Meals
- Free and Reduced-Price School Meals Household Application
- Sharing Information with Medicaid/PeachCare and Other Programs
- Direct Certification Notification Letter
- Parent Notification Letters
- Special Assistance Provision 2 Family Letter
- Special Assistance Provision 2 Assurances with Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

- Collection and Service Procedures
- State Prototype Meal Accountability Procedure
- Public Release (Distributed by State)
- Spanish Version of Application and Verification Letters
- Meal Supplement for After School Care Program Assurances

| THIS AGREEMENT IS HEREBY EXECUTED ON BEHALF OF THE: | |
|---|---|
| SCHOOL FOOD AUTHORITY | GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION |
| (Original Signature) BY: | (Original Signature) BY: Nancy Rice |
| Title: | Title: Director, School Nutrition Program |
| Date: | Date: |