

FOOD AND NUTRITION MANAGEMENT  
FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE MEALS

COB  
(LEGAL)

**Free and  
Reduced-Price Meals**

The school food authority (SFA) shall ensure that lunches and meal supplements are made available free or at a reduced-price to all children who are determined by the SFA to be eligible for such benefits. The determination of a child's eligibility for free or reduced-price lunches and meal supplements is to be made in accordance with 7 C.F.R. Part 245. 7 C.F.R. 210.23(a) [For information regarding participation in the School Breakfast Program (SBP), see 7 C.F.R. 220.7 and School Meals Program Options, below.]

[For the definition of "school food authority," see COA(LEGAL).]

**Eligibility Appeals**

Each local educational agency (LEA) of a school participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), SBP, or the Special Milk Program (7 C.F.R. Part 215) or of a commodity-only school shall establish a hearing procedure under which:

1. A family can appeal from a decision made by the LEA with respect to an application the family has made for free or reduced-price meals or for free milk, and
2. The LEA can challenge the continued eligibility of any child for a free or reduced-price meal or for free milk. The hearing procedure shall provide for both the family and the local educational agency:
  - a. A simple, publicly announced method to make an oral or written request for a hearing;
  - b. An opportunity to be assisted or represented by an attorney or other person;
  - c. An opportunity to examine, prior to and during the hearing, any documents and records presented to support the decision under appeal;
  - d. 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;
  - e. An opportunity to present oral or documentary evidence and arguments supporting a position without undue interference;
  - f. An opportunity to question or refute any testimony or other evidence and to confront and cross-examine any adverse witnesses;
  - g. That the hearing shall be conducted and the decision made by a hearing official who did not participate in making the decision under appeal or in any previously held conference;

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- h. 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;
- i. That the parties concerned and any designated representative shall be notified in writing of the decision of the hearing official;
- j. That a written record shall be prepared with respect to each hearing, which shall include the challenge or 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 therefor, and a copy of the notification to the parties concerned of the decision of the hearing official; and
- k. That the written record of each hearing shall be preserved for a period of three years and shall be available for examination by the parties concerned or their representatives at any reasonable time and place during that period.

**7 C.F.R. 245.7**

*“Local  
Educational  
Agency”*

“Local educational agency” means a public board of education legally constituted within a state for administrative control or direction of public elementary schools or secondary schools in a school district. **7 C.F.R. 245.2**

**Claims for  
Reimbursement**

**Internal Controls**

The school food authority shall establish internal controls which ensure the accuracy of meal counts prior to the submission of the monthly claim for reimbursement under the NSLP or the SBP, as applicable. At a minimum, these internal controls shall include an on-site review of the meal counting and claiming system employed by each school within the jurisdiction of the SFA; comparisons of daily free, reduced-price, and paid meal counts against data which will assist in the identification of meal counts in excess of the number of free, reduced-price, and paid meals served each day to children eligible for such meals; and a system for following up on those meal counts which suggest the likelihood of meal counting problems. **7 C.F.R. 210.8(a), 220.11(a)**

**On-Site Reviews**

Every school year, each SFA with more than one school shall perform no less than one on-site review of the counting and claiming system and the readily observable general areas of review cited under **7 C.F.R. 210.18(h)** [regarding general areas of review by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA)] for each school under its jurisdiction under the NSLP, and for a minimum of 50 percent of schools under its jurisdiction with every school being reviewed at least once every two years under the SBP.

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The on-site review shall take place prior to February 1 of each school year. Further, if the review discloses problems with a school's meal counting or claiming procedures or general review areas, the SFA shall ensure that the school implements corrective action and, within 45 days of the review, conduct a follow-up on-site review to determine that the corrective action resolved the problems. Each on-site review shall ensure that the school's claim is based on the counting system and that the counting system, as implemented, yields the actual number of reimbursable free, reduced price, and paid meals, respectively, served for each day of operation.

*7 C.F.R. 210.8(a)(1), 220.11(d)(1)*

**Nondiscrimination  
and Confidentiality**

Nondiscrimination

In the operation of the program, no child shall be denied benefits or be otherwise discriminated against because of race, color, national origin, age, sex, or disability. SFAs shall comply with the requirements of:

1. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964,
2. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972,
3. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,
4. The Age Discrimination Act of 1975,
5. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations on nondiscrimination (7 C.F.R. Parts 15, 15a, and 15b), and
6. Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Instruction 113-1.

*7 C.F.R. 210.23(b)*

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**Note:** [FNS Instruction 113-1](#),<sup>1</sup> USDA [posters](#)<sup>2</sup> and [nondiscrimination statement](#)<sup>3</sup> for use by SFAs for all FNS programs, and other information may be found on the [USDA FNS Civil Rights website](#).<sup>4</sup> For information on handling civil rights complaints, see TDA's [Food and Nutrition Division Administrator's Reference Manual](#).<sup>5</sup> Section 3, *Civil Rights & Confidentiality*.

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SFAs participating in the NSLP, SBP, Special Milk Program, or commodity-only schools shall take all actions that are necessary to ensure compliance with the following nondiscrimination practices for children eligible to receive free and reduced-price meals or free milk:

1. The names of the children shall not be published, posted or announced in any manner;

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2. There shall be no overt identification of any of the children by the use of special tokens or tickets or by any other means;
3. The children shall not be required to work for their meals or milk;
4. The children shall not be required to use a separate dining area, go through a separate serving line, enter the dining area through a separate entrance or consume their meals or milk at a different time; and
5. When more than one lunch or breakfast or type of milk is offered which meets the requirements prescribed in applicable federal regulations, the children shall have the same choice of meals or milk that is available to those children who pay the full price for their meal or milk.

**7 C.F.R. 245.8**

**Confidentiality**

The use or disclosure of any information obtained from an application for free or reduced-price meals, or from a state or local agency referred to in 7 U.S.C. 1758(b)(3)(F), (4), or (5) shall be limited in accordance with section 9 of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act. 42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(6); 7 C.F.R. 245.6(f)–(j)

*Unauthorized  
Disclosure or  
Misuse of  
Information*

In accordance with section 9(b)(6)(C) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(6)(C)), any individual who publishes, divulges, discloses, or makes known in any manner, or to any extent not authorized by statute or this section, any information obtained under this section will be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned for up to one year, or both. 7 C.F.R. 245.6(k)

**School Meals  
Program Options**

If at least ten percent of the students enrolled in one or more schools in a district are eligible for free or reduced-price breakfasts under the national school breakfast program provided for by the Child Nutrition Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1773), the board shall either:

1. Participate in the national program and extend its benefits to all eligible students in the school or schools; or
2. Develop and implement a locally funded program to provide free meals, including breakfast and lunch, to each student eligible for free meals under federal law and reduced-price meals, including breakfast and lunch, to each student eligible for reduced-price meals under federal law, provided that the reduced price may not exceed the maximum allowable rate under federal law.

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A district is permitted to participate in the national program at one or more campuses in the district and provide a locally funded program at one or more other campuses in the district.

Free Breakfast

A campus participating in the national school breakfast program or providing a locally funded program in which 80 percent or more of the students qualify under the national program for a free or reduced-price breakfast shall offer a free breakfast to each student.

*Waiver*

The commissioner of education shall grant a waiver of the free breakfast requirement, not to exceed one year, to a campus if the board votes to request the waiver at the board's annual meeting to discuss and adopt the budget and the proposed tax rate under Education Code 44.044. Before voting to request a waiver, the board shall list the waiver as a separate item for consideration on the meeting's agenda and provide an opportunity for public comment regarding the waiver at the meeting.

*Education Code 33.901*

**Summer Nutrition Program**

Unless the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) grants a district a waiver, a district in which 50 percent or more of the students are eligible to participate in the national free or reduced-price lunch program under 42 U.S.C. Section 1751 et seq. shall provide or arrange for the provision of a summer nutrition program for at least 30 days during the period in which district schools are recessed for the summer. *Agriculture Code 12.0029(b)*

"Summer nutrition program" means the Summer Food Service Program under 42 U.S.C. 1761. The term includes the seamless summer option under 42 U.S.C. 1761(a)(8). *Agriculture Code 12.0029(a)(2)*

Notice from TDA

Not later than October 31 of each year, TDA shall notify each qualifying district of the district's responsibility concerning provision of a summer nutrition program during the next period in which school is recessed for the summer. *Agriculture Code 12.0029(c)*

Notice to TDA

Each district that receives a notice from TDA shall, not later than January 31 of the year following the year in which the notice was received, inform TDA in writing that the district intends to provide or arrange for the provision of a summer nutrition program during the next period in which district schools are recessed for the summer; or request in writing that TDA grant the district a waiver of the requirement. *Agriculture Code 12.0029(e)*

*Required Documentation*

A district that arranges for the provision of a summer nutrition program must enter into an agreement to partner or collaborate with a local governmental entity, educational institution, or private non-

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profit organization to ensure meal service for children in the district's attendance area and must provide TDA with written documentation of the arrangement no later than April 1 of each year.

*4 TAC 25.601(b)*

Waiver

Not later than November 30 of each year, the board of a district that intends to request a waiver must send written notice of the district's intention to the district's local school health advisory council. The notice must include an explanation of the district's reason for requesting a waiver of the requirement. *Agriculture Code*

*12.0029(d)*

TDA may grant a district a one-year waiver of the requirement to provide or arrange for the provision of a summer nutrition program only if:

1. The district has worked with the TDA field offices to identify another possible provider for the program in the district, and the district provides documentation, verified by TDA, showing that:
  - a. There are fewer than 100 children in the district currently eligible for the national free or reduced-price lunch program;
  - b. Transportation to enable district students to participate in the program is an insurmountable obstacle to the district's ability to provide or arrange for the provision of the program despite consultation by the district with public transit providers;
  - c. The district is unable to provide or arrange for the provision of a program due to renovation or construction of district facilities and the unavailability of an appropriate alternate provider or site; or
  - d. The district is unable to provide or arrange for the provision of a program due to another specified extenuating circumstance and the unavailability of an appropriate alternate provider or site; or
2. The cost to the district to provide or arrange for provision of a program would be cost-prohibitive, as determined by TDA using the criteria and methodology established by TDA rule.

*Agriculture Code 12.0029(f); 4 TAC 25.601(d), (e)*

*Alternate  
Provider*

If a district has requested a waiver and has been unable to provide to TDA a list of possible providers for the summer nutrition program, the TDA field offices shall continue to attempt to identify an

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alternate provider for the district's summer nutrition program. *Agriculture Code 12.0029(i)*

**Community  
Eligibility Provision**

The community eligibility provision (CEP) is an alternative reimbursement option for eligible high-poverty districts. Each CEP cycle lasts up to four years before the LEA or school is required to recalculate their reimbursement rate. LEAs and schools have the option to recalculate sooner, if desired. An LEA may elect this provision for all of its schools, a group of schools, or an individual school. Participating LEAs must offer free breakfasts and lunches for the length of their CEP cycle, not to exceed four successive years, to all children attending participating schools and receive meal reimbursement based on claiming percentages, as described in 7 C.F.R. 245.9(f)(4)(v). 7 C.F.R. 245.9(f); 42 U.S.C. 1759a(a)(1)(F)

To be eligible to participate in the CEP, an LEA, group of schools, or school must:

1. Have an identified student percentage of at least 40 percent, as of April 1 of the school year prior to participating in the CEP, unless otherwise specified by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Individual schools participating in a group may have less than 40 percent identified students, provided that the average identified student percentage for the group is at least 40 percent.
2. Participate in the NSLP and SBP for the duration of the four-year cycle. Schools that operate on a limited schedule, where it is not operationally feasible to offer both lunch and breakfast, may elect CEP with FNS approval.
3. Comply with the procedures and requirements specified in 7 C.F.R. 245.9(f)(4) to participate in the CEP.

7 C.F.R. 245.9(f)(3)

[For information on other special assistance certification and reimbursement alternatives, see 7 C.F.R. 245.9.]

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<sup>1</sup> FNS Instruction 113-1 document: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/113-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> USDA FNS "And Justice for All" posters: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cr/and-justice-all-posters-guidance-and-translations>

<sup>3</sup> USDA nondiscrimination statement: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/civil-rights/usda-nondiscrimination-statement-other-fns-programs>

<sup>4</sup> USDA FNS Civil Rights website: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/civil-rights>

<sup>5</sup> TDA's Food and Nutrition Division *Administrator's Reference Manual*: <https://squaremeals.org/Programs/NationalSchoolLunchProgram/Policy-ARM.aspx>