

UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

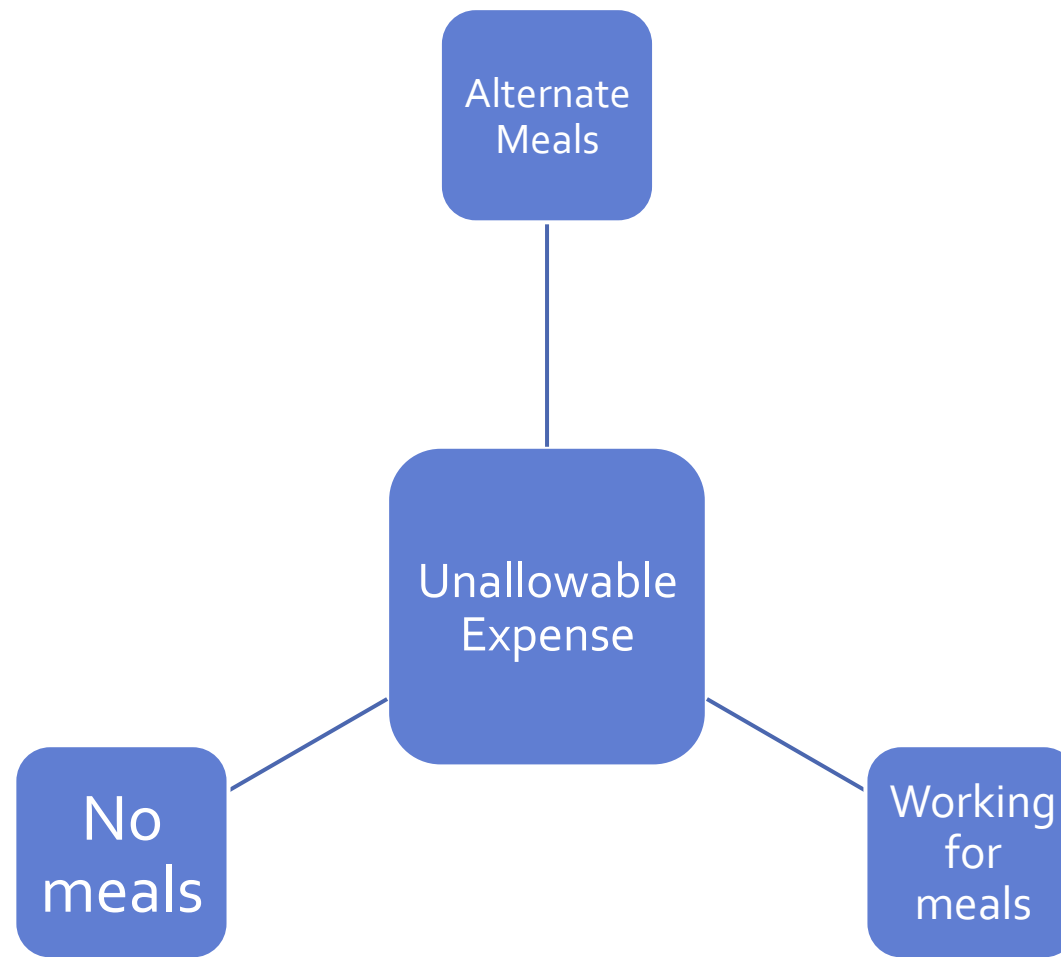
Jo Dawson, Program Manager



Media

- <http://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2017/11/21/stewartville-lunch-dumping/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSSF6dtnxbM>

Unallowable Meals: Crux of the Issue



Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010

- Required USDA to examine the report to Congress on current charge and alternate meal policies and practices
- Final report submitted to Congress July 2016



USDA Studies

- 58% of SFA incurred unpaid meal costs during SY 2010-2011
- 35% of States did not have a policy
 - Study
 - RFI
 - Webinars



Local Charge Policy Requirement

- All districts must develop a meal charge policy by July 1, 2017
 - Develop
 - Communicate
- Local Discretion



Key Policy Considerations

- Maintain the financial integrity of the Programs
- Provide children with adequate nutrition to focus in school
- Minimize stigmatization children with meal charges



Preventing Student Distress

Discouraged Actions	Encouraged Actions
Announcing or publicizing the names of children with unpaid meal charges	Communicating privately with families about a child's outstanding balance
Using hand stamps, stickers, or other physical markers to identify children with unpaid meal charges	Communicating payment reminders directly and discreetly to adults in the household
Sending clearly marked notices home when children have an outstanding balance	Sending discrete reminders in a plain, white envelope
Throwing a child's meal in the trash if they are unable to pay	Serving children the regular reimbursable meal while working with the family to obtain payment

Stakeholder Involvement

- School administrators
- School board members
- School food service professionals
- Social workers
- Families

Alternate Meals

USDA encourages providing a full reimbursable meal

If alternate meals are offered, district policy should explain:

- The meal service that alternate meal is offered
- The duration of alternate meals
- The cost of alternate meal
- How alternate meals are presented



Alternate Meal Requirements

- Reimbursable alternate meals must:
 - Meet the meal pattern requirements
 - Meet Paid Lunch Equity requirements (i.e. cannot charge less for a reimbursable meal than federally required)
- Non-Reimbursable alternate meals must:
 - Be paid for using non-Federal funds
 - Meet Smart Snack and non-program food revenue requirements

Policy Recommendations: Debt Collections

- Focus on adults responsible for providing funds
- Consider costs versus benefits of debt collection efforts

Policy Communications: Families

- Districts must communicate the policy, in writing, to:
 - All families at the start of the school year
 - Families with students who transfer in mid-year
- Methods:
 - With applications at the beginning of the year
 - “Back to School” packets
 - Student handbooks
 - Written notices

Policy Communication: Staff

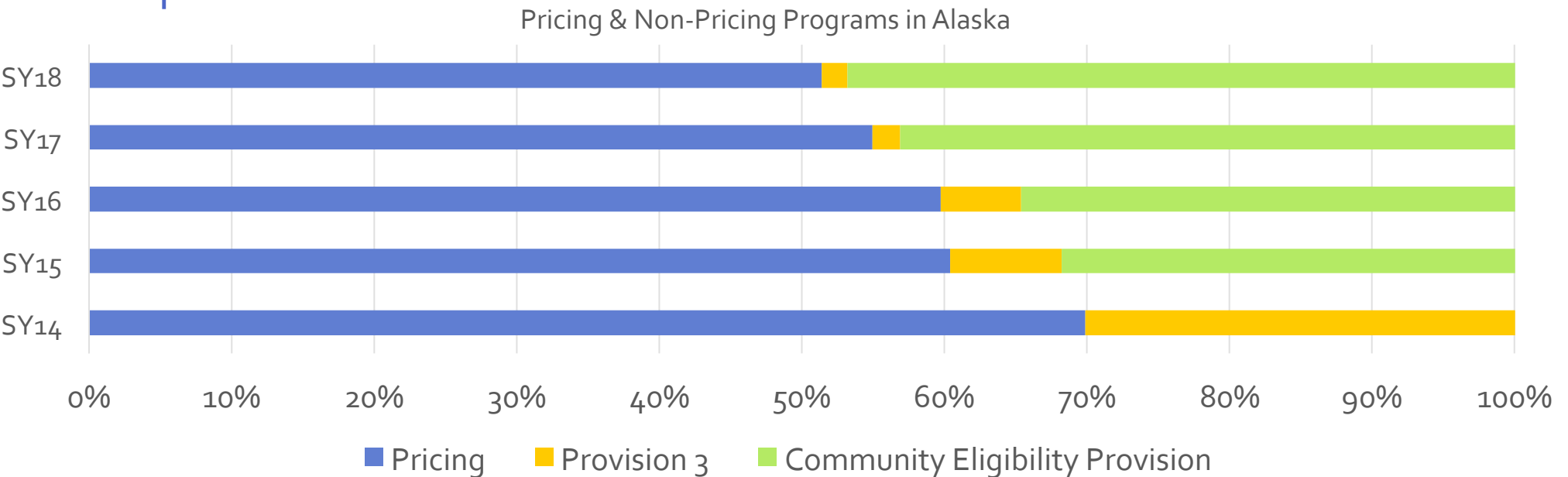
- Districts must communicate policy, in writing, to staff members responsible for:
 - Collecting payment
 - Notifying families of low/negative balances
 - Enforcing the policy

Recordkeeping

- Districts must provide the policies to the state agency during the Administrative Review
- Districts must maintain documentation of the communications to staff and families

Best Practices

- Community Eligibility Provision
 - Allows eligible schools to offer school meals at no charge to all students
 - Saves time and money by streamlining paperwork and administrative requirements



Best Practices: Outreach

- Summer Outreach
- School Year Outreach
- Community Outreach



Best Practices: Changes in Household Circumstances

- Families may apply, or reapply, for free or reduced-price meals at any time during the school year.



Best Practices: Transfer Students

- Schools are encouraged to accept transfer student's previous eligibility determination
- Schools are not liable for the accuracy of the previous determination (SP 51-2016)
- Include in welcome packet



Best Practices: Payment Options

- Notification before account overdue
 - Email
 - Telephone
 - Automated
 - In-person
 - With other reminders
- Provide online payment systems
- Encourage families to track spending
- Allow automatic deductions when balances are low
- Provide repayment plans



Discretionary Elimination of RP Charges

- At the discretion of districts, schools may serve meals at no cost for students eligible for reduced-price meals
- Expenditures associated with covering the student payment may be funded from the nonprofit food service account



Charitable Funding Sources

- Community Funding
- Random Acts of Kindness funding
- School fundraisers
- End of year donations
- District should have distribution plan
- Nutrition staff should not be expected to:
 - Solicit funds
 - Pay for student meals



Adult Meals

- Not reimbursable
- Only an allowable expense for program staff
- District must have charge/payment policy



USDA Resources



- Policy Guidance
 - SP 46-2016 Local Meal Charge Policies
 - SP 47-2016 clarification on Delinquent Meal Payments
 - SP 57-201 Guidance and Q & A
- Best Practices
 - Guide: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools
 - Webinar: The challenge of Unpaid Meals: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/unpaid-meal-charges>

Alaska Child Nutrition Resources

- Alaska Model Policy (best practice)
- Alaska Unpaid Meal Policy Questionnaire
- Links to USDA and FRAC materials



<https://education.alaska.gov/cnp/mealchargepolicy>

QUESTIONS?

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