

2025 ISBE School Nutrition Training

Benefit Issuance and Meal Counting

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**CHILD NUTRITION
PROGRAMS**

 **ILLINOIS**
STATE BOARD OF
EDUCATION

Purpose of this Training

To provide guidance for successful implementation of the following:

- Eligibility Documentation
- Benefit Issuance
- Collection Procedures
- Overt Identification
- Meal Counting Procedures
- Point of Service Procedures (POS)



Eligibility Documentation

The SFA must have documentation to claim free and/or reduced-price meals for reimbursement. Documentation can be:

- Household Eligibility Application (HEA)
- Direct Certification (DC) documentation
- Foster Child documentation
- Homeless, Migrant, and/or Runaway liaison documentation
- Head Start/Even Start documentation (Master List)
- RCCI documentation (Master List)

For Eligibility guidance refer to: [SNP Administrative Handbook \(Section F & G\)](#).

Benefit Issuance

- Benefit Issuance is created utilizing approved eligibility documentation to communicate each student's approved category (Free, Reduced-Price, or Paid) to the meal counting method utilized at the Point of Service (POS).
- Benefit Issuance must be updated whenever a student's approved category changes.

Examples of systems used to accurately count meals based on benefit issuance documentation:

- Student ID cards
- Key/Pin Pad
- Bar Code Cards
- Student Tickets
- Student Rosters
- Biometrics

Overt Identification

- The SFA must prevent overt identification at the POS to ensure each students' eligibility for free or reduced-price meals is confidential.

Overt Identification

- **Allowable Codes:**

- ✓ *Number Series:* 1000–1999 (Free), 2000–2999 (Reduced), and 3000–3999 (Paid).
- ✓ *Number of Digits:* Vary the length of coded numbers by category: Four-digits (Free), five-digits (Reduced), and six-digits (Paid).
- ✓ *Variations:* Vary the style of the students' enrollment dates: 10/2/16 (Free), 10-2-16 (Reduced), and 10.2.16 (Paid).
- ✓ *Coded Roster:* If a more efficient method is not available, a roster can be coded using any of the methods listed above to take the meal count at the POS.

- **Unallowable Codes by the USDA:**

- ✓ The words Free, Reduced, and Paid or “F”, “R”, “P”.
- ✓ Single symbols such as A, B, C, 1, 2, 3 or AAA, BBB, CCC.

Point of Service (POS)

- Daily meal counts must be taken by a **trained** food service staff member at that end of the food service line where it can be determined that a reimbursable meal, containing all required components at the correct portion sizes, has been served to an eligible student.
- When meals are served on a field trip or in a room other than the cafeteria, such as a classroom, meal counts must be taken at the POS **after** all the required components are offered ensuring a reimbursable meal is selected by each student. **Meal counts cannot be based on a morning count, a pre-order count, or the number of meals sent and/or left-over.**

Steps for a Successful Point of Service (POS)

- 1) All reimbursable meal choices offered must contain the required components that meet the daily minimum requirements.
- 2) Each reimbursable meal must be evaluated at the POS to ensure the meal contains the required number of components prior to being counted.
- 3) All meals must be counted utilizing an acceptable meal counting system.

Point of Service (POS) Best Practices

- A daily pre-service meeting with all serving and POS staff to discuss the meal options and what constitutes a reimbursable meal at the POS.
- Utilize staff members to limit the number of students allowed in the serving line/area at one time for a more efficient POS meal count.
- Utilize stanchions to control the flow and create a single file serving line directing students to the POS without the ability to exit the serving line.

Point of Service (POS) Best Practices

- Additional components should be available to offer at the POS to assist staff members when student selections do not meet a reimbursable meal.
- For both breakfast and lunch, offer fruit and/or vegetable servings in 1/2c portions for Offer vs Serve.
- If meals need to be consumed at an alternate location, students should receive their meals in the cafeteria, counted at the POS, and then taken to the alternate locations (classrooms, administrative offices, etc.).
 - ✓ If students are unable to receive their meals in the cafeteria, then meals must be delivered by trained staff members and an accurate POS count taken after each child receives a reimbursable meal.

Acceptable Meal Counting Methods

- **Student ID cards:** Each student's ID card is scanned at the electronic meal count system, located at the end of the serving line, by either the student or cashier after determining the meal is reimbursable.
- **Key/Pin Pad:** Each student enters their assigned number code into the Key/Pin Pad at the electronic meal count system, located at the end of the serving line, after determining the meal is reimbursable.
- **Bar Codes:** Bar codes for each student are scanned by the cashier at the electronic meal count system, located at the end of the serving line, after determining the meal is reimbursable.
- **Student Coded Tickets:** Collected at the POS and either manually counted or entered in an electronic meal count system.
- **Student Rosters:** A staff member checks off the student's name.

Unacceptable Meal Counting Methods

- Counts taken anywhere other than at the POS (beginning of line).
- A back-out system, subtracting left-overs minus the number of meals prepared, to obtain a final meal count.
- Attendance/morning counts.
- Tray counts.
- Meals delivered.
- Entrees prepared.
- Number of meals paid for in-advance.
- The number of free and reduced-price eligible students.
- Visual identification of students with no backup system available.
- Number of tickets sold and distributed.
- A system of converting cash meals.

SFA's Policy on Outstanding School Food Service Balances

- Policies on outstanding school food service balances are set at the school district level and must adhere to USDA regulations.
- Must have a written and clearly communicated meal charge policy to ensure a consistent and transparent approach. This policy must be communicated in writing to all households at the start of each school year and to households that transfer into the school district during the school year.
- Students eligible for FREE, REDUCED-PRICE and PAID meals must be provided a meal regardless of money owed on à la carte items, second meals purchased, or meal charges accrued prior to certification.

SFA's Policy on Outstanding School Food Service Balances

- A child eligible for FREE meals must be offered the **same** reimbursable meal options as all other eligible children regardless of their debt.
- The purchasing of à la carte items on an account which owes money should be handled according to the SFA-level policy.
- Any collection procedures or resources available to the SFA may be used for the collection of debt, including collection agencies. Collection efforts should be directed at the legal guardians that are responsible for providing funds for meal purchases.

Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights Act *(PA 100-1092)

- Signed into law on August 26, 2018
- [Public Act 100-1092](#) (the Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights Act) states: If the amount owed by a student for meals or snacks is owed and payable to a school district in an amount that is no less than \$500 and the school district has made reasonable efforts to collect the debt from the student's parent or guardian for at least one year, the school district may seek an offset under the State Comptroller Act.

Highlights of PA 100-1092

- The act requires every public or private elementary or secondary school in Illinois that participates in a U.S. Department of Agriculture child nutrition program to provide a federally reimbursable meal or snack to a student of that school who requests the reimbursable meal or snack, regardless of whether the student has the ability to pay for the reimbursable meal or snack or owes money for previously charged meals or snacks.
- If a student owes money for meals or snacks that is in excess of the equivalent of the amount charged a student for five lunches, or a lower amount as determined by the student's school district or private school, a school may reach out to the parent or guardian of the student to attempt collection of the owed money and to request that the parent or guardian apply for meal benefits in a federal or state child nutrition program.

Highlights of PA 100-1092

- If the amount owed by a student for meals or snacks is owed and payable to a school district in an amount that is no less than \$500 and the school district has made reasonable efforts to collect the debt from the student's parent or guardian for at least one year, the school district may seek an offset under the State Comptroller Act.
- A school may not publicly identify or stigmatize a student who cannot pay for a reimbursable meal or snack or who owes money for a meal or snack in a manner that includes, but is not limited to:
 - requiring the student to wear a wristband;
 - giving the student a hand stamp;
 - requiring the student to throw away a meal or snack after being served;
 - requiring the student to sit in a separate location;
 - publicly posting the name of the student; or
 - any other action that would stigmatize the student.

Nutrition Department

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Thank you