

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Food and
Nutrition
Service

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DATE: October 8, 2014

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SUBJECT: Online Fees in the School Meal Programs

TO: Regional Directors
Special Nutrition Programs
All Regions

State Directors
Child Nutrition Programs
All States

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) considers access to a healthy school meal a critical function of Child Nutrition Programs. FNS Instruction 782-6 established the longstanding policy that children participating in the school meal programs not be charged any additional fees for services provided in conjunction with the delivery of these programs. Charging fees in addition to the regular reduced price or paid meal charge limits access to the programs and imposes an additional criterion for participation. This memorandum addresses recent questions regarding how this policy applies to fees associated with online services in school meal programs.

Many school food authorities (SFAs) offer online services to parents, including providing online options for parents to add money to their children's meal account. SFAs can charge a fee for these types of services but only if the SFA also offers a method for the household to add money to the account that does not add any additional fees for these services. Examples of methods SFAs can use for parents to add money to their children's meal account without incurring a fee include accepting money at the school food service office or accepting cash payments at the point of service.

As an alternative to charging parents a fee for these services, SFAs may use school food service account funds to cover the cost of providing online services to parents. If the school food service account does not have the funds to cover these costs, SFAs can seek outside sources to cover the costs associated with providing this service. Outside funding for these purposes may include monies donated from the general fund or outside organizations.

Regional Directors

State Directors

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State agencies are asked to distribute this Memorandum to program operators immediately. SFAs should contact their State agency for additional information. State agencies may direct any questions concerning this guidance to the appropriate Food and Nutrition Service Regional Office.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cynthia Long". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Cynthia Long
Deputy Administrator
Child Nutrition Programs