



NEWTRITION!

UPDATES ON NUTRITION AT YOUR SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 2014

Unpaid Lunch Balances – A Growing Concern

USDA Gives School Officials the Authority to Complete a Meal Application for a Student in Need

The Salt Lake City School District made the news in late January, when school food service workers took meals away from students and threw them away. The reason – negative lunch account balances. The press vilified school officials. The problem of unpaid account balances is widespread across the country. A 2012 School Nutrition Association survey of school meal program directors found that 53% of school districts were experiencing an increase in unpaid meal charges. This becomes a challenge to district leaders who must manage the school foodservice budget while being sensitive to the needs of children they serve.



Research indicates that an increasing number of children arrive in the cafeteria unable to pay for their meals.

School districts are now faced with adopting policies to address the number of charges allowed per student and how to provide meals to students after they reach their limit. Are some of these unpaid balances from students who cannot afford to pay for meals? If so, **local school officials may complete an application for a child known to be eligible if the household fails to apply.**

To learn more about completing an application for a child, see the information below, taken from the Eligibility

Manual for School Meals (Section I, pages 35-36) provided by Child Nutrition Program, FNS, USDA.

Link to Eligibility Manual: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/EliMan.pdf>

HOUSEHOLDS THAT FAIL TO APPLY

“Local school officials may complete an application for a child known to be eligible if the household fails to apply. When exercising this option, the school official must complete an application on behalf of the child based on the best household size and income information. The source of the information must be noted on the application. Names of household members, the last four digits of the social security number and signature of an adult household member need not be secured. *These applications are excluded from verification.* However, the household must be notified that the child has been certified to receive free and reduced price benefits.

This option is intended for limited use in individual situations and must not be used to make eligibility determinations for categories or groups of children.”

Opaa! Food Management believes that school officials should consider this little known provision, if appropriate; to ensure that eligible students receive nutritious meals at school.