

**Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Office for Food and Nutrition Programs
School Year 2025-2026**

Annual Free and Reduced Price Meal Policy Statement

Agreement # 05-258-CS-4

Local Educational Agency: Salem Academy Charter School

Each Local Educational Agency (LEA), as defined in 7 CFR 245.2, for schools participating in the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program or Special Milk Program or a commodity only school, shall provide meal benefit forms for use by families in making application for free or reduced price meals or free milk for their children. Every permanent Policy for Determining Eligibility for Free and Reduced Price Meals is maintained at MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with the Office for Food and Nutrition Programs. This policy is an assurance that all meals served to children will be done in a manner that ensures all children have equal access to the child nutrition programs.

I. LEA Responsibilities:

(Application, eligibility and certification of children for free and reduced price meals and free milk. 7 CFR 245.6)

The LEA agrees to each of the conditions below:

- A. The Local Educational Agency (LEA) annually designates determining, confirming, verifying, and hearing officials for the meal benefit issuance process.
- B. The current school year's Income Eligibility Guidelines (IEGs) are used when determining student eligibility and extends appropriate benefits to members of the household or same economic unit. Files of currently approved and denied free and reduced price certification documentation are maintained 7 CFR 210.9(b)(18).
- C. Household applications for free and reduced price meals are processed according to federal regulations 7 CFR 245.6. Submitted eligibility documentation by families is retained for a period of 3 years after the end of the fiscal year 7 CFR 210.9(b)(20).
- D. Directly Certified households are notified with eligibility as specified in 7 CFR 245.6(c)(2) and includes this notice in their policy statement. Documentation is maintained when determining children's eligibility through direct certification.
- E. The LEA provides a description of the method or methods to be used to collect payments from those children paying the full price for meals or milk, or the reduced price of a meal, which will prevent the overt identification of the children receiving free or reduced price meals.
- F. The LEA abides by the hearing procedures set forth in 7 CFR 245.7 and the nondiscrimination practices set forth in 7 CFR 245.8.
- G. Free meals are served to:
 - Children from families or households whose income is at or below the free income level in the current IEGs;
 - Children from households that provide a confirmed agency ID#, accompanied by official agency documentation, on the application; and
 - Children who are categorically free as indicated in 7 CFR 245.6 and the IEGs
 - Free Exact Match through Virtual Gateway.
- H. Reduced price meals are served to children from families whose income is at or within the income level in the current IEG for reduced price meals or who have been directly certified through the Virtual Gateway.
- I. The LEA implements procedures when selling competitive foods during meal service that prevent overt identification of the children receiving free or reduced price meals.

- J. Disclosure of confidential free and reduced price eligibility information meet federal compliance under 7 CFR 245.6(f-k).

II. **LEA Operation of the School Food Service Program**

The LEA agrees to operate its school food service programs in compliance with the requirements below.

A. Nondiscrimination

LEAs participating in the NSLP, SBP or SMP shall not discriminate based on race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The LEA shall ensure that there are no barriers for participation in the Child Nutrition Programs (CNP) for Limited English Proficient (LEP) families, and that the LEA will communicate with parents and guardians in a language they can understand through the certification and verification processes. The LEA shall take all necessary actions to ensure compliance with the nondiscrimination practices for children eligible to receive free and reduced price meals.

The LEA shall have [written procedures for receiving and processing Civil Rights complaints](#) that identify the outside agency to which complaints are forwarded (MA DESE, Food and Nutrition Service Northeast Regional Office, Office of Civil Rights or the USDA Office of Civil Rights).

The LEA must include the USDA nondiscrimination statement on all applicable CNP materials and at the point where reimbursable meals are served. LEAs selling competitive foods during a meal service are encouraged to include in the description of how the cafeteria and meal service prevents overt identification of the children receiving free and reduced price meals.

Further assurance is given that children eligible for free or reduced price meals or free milk shall not be required to:

- The names of children eligible to receive free or reduced price meals or free milk shall not be published, posted, or announced in any manner.
- There shall be no overt identification of any such children by use of special tokens or tickets, or by any other means.
- Children shall not be required to work for their meals or milk.
- Children should not be required to use a separate lunchroom, go through a separate serving line, enter the lunchroom through a separate entrance, or consume meals at a different time.
- Children shall have the same choice of meals.

That in the operation of Child Nutrition Programs, no child shall be discriminated against because of his or her race, sex (including gender identification and sexual orientation), age, color, disability, national origin, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

B. Anonymity and Accountability

LEAs shall establish procedures to collect money from children who pay for their meals and to account for the number of free, reduced price and full price meals served. The LEA will ensure that overt identification of a child's eligibility status does not take place.

C. Public Release

The LEA must make available the Public Media Release, annually, describing how families may apply for benefits and provide the current IEGs.

III. **LEA Administration of the Eligibility Process**

The LEA agrees to administer the eligibility process in compliance with the requirements below.

A. Letter to Households

The LEA distributes a letter and an application for free and reduced price meals to households. Directions on how to apply for benefits must be included.

Any significant modifications to the MA DESE letter template and application must be reviewed and approved by DESE.

B. Household Applications 7 CFR 245.6(a)(1)

- The Local Educational Agency (LEA) must provide a household application for families to apply for all children within the same LEA throughout the year.
- The LEA must provide newly enrolled students with an application and determine eligibility promptly.
- The LEA cannot require the household to submit an application for each child attending its schools.
- When a student transfers to a new school district, the new local educational agency may accept the eligibility determination from the student's former local educational agency without incurring liability for the accuracy of the initial determination (7 CFR 245.6(a)(4)).
- Parents/guardians must be informed of their eligibility determinations and notified, in writing, the reason(s) for the denial of their application.
- They must also be notified of the right and process to appeal and the Hearing Official.

Electronic systems must comply with regulations (7 CFR 245.6(b)(3)) and are reviewed based on the "Scanned and Web-Based Application Checklist".

<i>Effective Date of Eligibility Determinations - Each LEA must use the selected process district wide</i>
N/A - Household applications not collected for any school (RCCI that does not collect applications or all schools in the District participate in CEP or Provision 2. Do not check if any schools are Provision 2 in a base year.

C. Direct Certification

All local educational agencies must conduct Direct Certification using the Virtual Gateway at or around the beginning of the school year, three months after the initial effort and six months after the initial effort. Households must be notified of eligibility results for free or reduced price meals through Direct Certification. LEAs must extend free benefits to all children in the household or the same economic unit 7 CFR 245.2(b)(7). CEP districts are expected to conduct Direct Certification at least ONCE a year. All districts are encouraged to conduct monthly Direct Certification uploads. ***Failure to conduct Direct Certification using the Virtual Gateway will result in claim reimbursement being withheld.***

D. Categorical Eligibility - Foster, Homeless, Migrant, Runaway, or Head Start Children 7 CFR 210.9(b)(8).

To be categorically eligible as a Foster child, a Homeless child, a Migrant child, a Runaway child, or a Head Start child, the child's individual eligibility is provided by officials such as the LEA homeless/foster liaison. Categorical eligibility based on these programs shall not be extended to other children in the household.

E. Special Provisions

Special provision options are available to LEAs with prior MA DESE approval.

Provision 2: In schools where all enrolled children, regardless of their category of eligibility, are served meals at no charge; notify parents, distribute, and certify applications for free and reduced price students once every four consecutive school years. For three years after the base year, the school is not required to count meals served by category for claiming purposes. After the base year, the school's monthly reimbursement is based on total meal counts and monthly claim statistics from the base year. Maintain accountability and record keeping requirements as mandated by program regulations for this alternate reimbursement system. This provision is applied on a per program basis. SFAs must inform and get approval from the SA at the end of the Provision 2 cycle for extensions, new base years or streamlined

base years. Four year extensions may be approved if the income level of the school's population, as adjusted for inflation, has remained stable, declined or had only negligible improvement since the base year. Acceptable methods of determination include direct certification matching and census data collected during the base year and the year the extension is requested.

- **School(s) must meet the criteria outlined in 7 CFR 245.9(b).**

Participating LEAs in Provision 2 must complete the chart below:

List the names of the school(s) that participate in Provision 2 and socioeconomic data used in the base year (and for consideration for an extension)	SY Enter Base Year of Provision 2	SY Enter last year of Provision 2 (year in which an extension will be considered)	Which programs are being offered at each participating school?	
			Breakfast	Lunch

Participating districts are eligible for an extension or new base year given that the socioeconomic data supports an extension of Provision 2.

- Community Eligibility Provision (CEP): Schools where at least 25 percent of enrolled students have been deemed free eligible through a means other than an income application (i.e., directly certified using electronic SNAP/Medicaid, homeless, migrant, runaway, foster, and head start) as of April 1 prior to the school year of election, the school may participate in the Community Eligibility Provision for the subsequent school year. All meals will be served at no charge, and the schools will receive reimbursement in the free and paid category based on the percentage of directly certified students, also known as the Identified Student Percentage (ISP), times a multiplier (as written in federal regulation). **School(s) must meet the criteria outlined in 7 CFR 245.9(f).**

Select the level of Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Election

<i>District-wide:</i> The entire district is approved for CEP based on the district wide numbers.	<i>Individual School(s):</i> An individual school is approved for CEP based on that individual school.	<i>Groups of Schools:</i> A series of schools are approved for CEP based on a group of schools.
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☒ **District-wide**

☐ **Individual School(s):**

☐ **Groups of Schools**

List name of the: <i>district, group of school or individual school(s)</i> that participate in CEP	Starting Year of CEP cycle	Ending Year of CEP cycle	Grace Year of CEP cycle
			(if eligible)
SALEM ACADEMY CHARTER SCHOOL	2024	2027	<input type="checkbox"/>

F. Hearing Procedure

7 CFR 245.6(c)(8) Appeals of denied benefits. A family that wishes to appeal an application that was denied may do so in accordance with the procedures established by the local educational agency as required by §245.7. However, prior to initiating the hearing procedure, the family may request a conference to provide the opportunity for the family and local educational agency officials to discuss the situation, present information, and obtain an explanation of the data submitted in the application or the decision rendered. The request for a conference shall not in any way prejudice or diminish the right to a fair hearing. The local educational authority shall promptly schedule a fair hearing, if requested.

The LEA must establish and use a fair hearing procedure in cases of appeal by parent/guardian of the school's decision on applications and in cases where the school official

challenges the accuracy of information contained in an application or of the continued eligibility of any child for a free or reduced price meal.

When initiating the hearing procedure, the parent or local school official may request a conference to provide an opportunity for the parent and school official to discuss the situation, present information, and obtain an explanation of data submitted on the application and decisions rendered. Such a conference shall not in any way prejudice or diminish the right to a fair hearing.

Per 7 CFR 245.7, the hearing procedure shall provide:

1. A simple, publicly announced method for making an oral or written request for a hearing;
 2. An opportunity to be assisted or represented by an attorney or other person in presenting an appeal;
 3. An opportunity to examine, prior to and during the hearing, the documents and records presented to support the decision under appeal;
 4. 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;
 5. An opportunity to present oral or documentary evidence and arguments supporting the position;
 6. An opportunity to question or refute any testimony or other evidence and to confront and cross-examine any adverse witnesses;
 7. 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 previous conference;
 8. That the decision of the hearing official, who may not be the same person as the reviewing and/or the verification official, shall be based on the oral and documentary evidence presented at the hearing and made a part of the hearing record;
 9. That the parties concerned, and their designated representative shall be notified in writing of the decision of the hearing official;
 10. That a written record shall be prepared with respect to each hearing which shall include: 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 therefore and a copy of the notification to the parties concerned of the decision of the hearing official; and
 11. That such written record of each hearing shall be preserved for a period of three years plus the current year and shall be made available for examination by the parties concerned or their representative at any reasonable time and place during such period.
- During appeal, hearing, and disposition of the case, the child will receive free or reduced price meals.

G. Records

The LEA shall maintain the following records for three years after the end of the fiscal year to which they pertain:

- All eligibility determinations obtained through the Direct Certification Process.
- All applications and documents to support homeless, migrant, head start, etc.
- Records of all appeals and challenges and their disposition.
- All notifications of eligibility determinations, including denial letters.
- Records of all verification efforts and resulting eligibility changes.

H. Verification

For income verification of meal eligibility applications, the LEA agrees to verify the eligibility of applicant households by November 15, in accordance with program regulations and annually maintain records. Each LEA shall designate a verification official to complete the activities for the LEA. The LEA must use the Standard Sample size for verification, unless prior approval by DESE, and prioritize the selection of error prone applications in the sample.

Additionally, the LEA must submit the Verification Data Collection Report (742R) in the DESE Security Portal by **December 12, 2025**.

I. Amendments to Policies

The LEA is to submit to MA DESE any alterations or amendments to the policy including eligibility criteria, applications, public announcements, etc., for approval prior to implementation. All changes in eligibility criteria shall be publicly announced in the same manner used at the beginning of the school year.

The LEA must amend its policy statement for any substantive changes to its free and reduced price policy and include a description of the change. Amendments must be approved by DESE prior to implementation and must reflect:

- Meal counting and claiming changes made by the LEA
- New determining, confirming and/or hearing officials
- Revisions in the letter to households or application for free and reduced price meals
- Changes required by laws/regulations and additional information as specified by DESE

A meal count collection method(s) as part of the medium of exchange needs to be in place to determine an accurate daily meal count and prevent the overt identification of any children receiving meal benefits. This information must be updated annually in each individual school site application located in the DESE Security Portal.

Identify by name and title the determining and confirming officials by school sites for the School Year 2025-2026.

Please list the name and title of the hearing official for the LEA. The person with this role and responsibility must be in an administrative position and not work directly in School Nutrition services. This completed document must be uploaded as part of your annual renewal and submitted to DESE by **September 19, 2025**.

Annual Determining, Confirming and Verification Official Update

District/School Name: Salem Academy Charter School **Agreement #** 05-258-CS-4

All schools in the district either do not participate in Provision 2 or are in a base year.

The same staff may not be both determining and confirming officials for the same application.

Determining Official(s): This is the school district official(s) assigned to the approval of meal benefit applications submitted by households for free and reduced price meal benefits. Confidentiality of information and eligibility must be maintained, as prescribed by law, for the determinations made. *The POS can be the determining official when the household completes the online application. When data is manually entered from a paper application, the determining official cannot be the POS.*

<u>Determining Official(s)</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>School(s)/Site(s)</u>

Confirming Official(s): This is the school administration official that confirms the original benefit determinations. Confidentiality of information and eligibility must be maintained, as prescribed by law, for the determinations made.

<u>Confirming Official(s)</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>School(s)/Site(s)</u>

Verification Official(s): The school administrator or designee that completes the income verification process. This person must maintain the confidentiality of information as prescribed by law.

<u>Verification Official(s)</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>School(s)/Site(s)</u>

Hearing Official: This official must be someone in an administrative position ***higher than*** the determining, confirming and verification official.

<u>Hearing Official</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>School/Site</u>

☒ I certify that I have read and understood the Free and Reduced Price Policy and that all the information submitted is accurate.

Submitted By:

Submitted Date:

**The signatory must be an individual who has the authority to represent the Local Education Agency (LEA) on matters pertaining to the school meals program. The person(s) to whom this authority has been granted by the LEA is authorized to sign the policy. Please note federal regulations in 7CFR210.16(a)(5) that state 'any School Food Authority that employs a food service management company in the operation of its nonprofit school food service shall retain signature authority on the Free and Reduced Price Policy statement'.*