

Debt Management Best Practices Toolkit

We know that this year, many schools are seeing unpaid meal charges add up. School meal debt is difficult and complex, and we want to help you better understand, manage, and control the school meal debt in your district.

This toolkit will help you make a holistic plan that works for your school. These resources can help you manage debt and better communicate expectations and goals to parents and students.

While using these tools, you can also help parents and students receive useful information from Michigan Department of Education's [Michigan School Meals](#) campaign. Parents and students can sign up by texting EAT to MIGHTY (644-489). More [resources to help you get parents and students signed up](#) are available from MDE.

1. **Make a holistic plan & policy that works for your school**

- a. It is vital to make a plan that works for your school. While you are required to have a school meal policy in place, the details of that policy are up to you.
- b. [Trainings from Michigan Department of Education](#) can help you design your plan based on what works best for your community.

2. **Prevent (or mitigate) debt by enrolling students in Free & Reduced-Price meal programs**

- a. Ensure all eligible students are enrolled and taking advantage of school meal programs. Families' economic statuses could change over the course of the school year. Be sure to communicate the availability of free and reduced-price meals for those who qualify.
- b. Run the direct certification report on a regular basis to be sure that you identify any students that may be newly qualified to receive free and reduced-price meals.
- c. [No Kid Hungry's FRP Meal Application Toolkit](#) can help you communicate with families and get students enrolled in the Free & Reduced-Price Meals program.

3. Communicate clearly with families about your unpaid school meal policy

- a. Once you've developed a policy, be sure to clearly and consistently communicate with parents.
- b. Use our [communications guidelines and best practices](#) to help you work with parents on unpaid meal debt.

4. Keep parents & guardians informed of their balance

- a. Use email or text message to keep parents, guardians, and in rare cases students informed of when their school lunch balance is low, that way they can avoid over drafting for meals.
- b. Use our [example text and email low balance reminders](#) to help you get started.

5. Have a plan for how to handle donations or angel funds

- a. Some districts may accept donations or work with "angel funds" to help alleviate school debt. Make sure you have a policy in place to guide these interactions.
- b. Use our [best practices on handling donations and angel funds](#) for school meal programs.

Additional resources:

State and Federal resource list: A [list of resources](#) you can refer to for extensive guidance regarding school meal debt.