



Indiana School and Community Nutrition Policy 2026-01

Complaint Investigation Procedure

- Policy:** The purpose of the complaint procedure is for the Indiana Department of Education's School and Community Nutrition (SCN) to have in place a standard process for receiving complaints related to operations of its Child Nutrition Programs (CNP). It also identifies the procedure for receiving complaints, conducting investigations, and taking any action related to the investigation determination.
- Scope:** Program participants and their families, School Food Authorities, Sponsors, Institutions, Responsible Parties and Responsible Individuals, Vendors, and all related staff participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Special Milk Program (SMP), School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the Food Distribution Program (FDP).
- Procedure:**
1. Any complaints received by SCN that are related to civil rights should be handled pursuant to the [Civil Rights Complaint Procedure for Child Nutrition Programs](#).
 2. Complaints can be submitted to SCN through a variety of means. Complainants can submit complaints directly to field specialists and program directors. Complaints can also be submitted to program-specific general contact emails or phone numbers such as summermeals@doe.in.gov. SCN can receive verbal complaints, but those who wish to file a complaint will be encouraged to submit a written complaint and provide documentation if available.
 3. Types of complaints may include:
 - Improper sponsor recruitment of program sites
 - Meal quality or menu concerns
 - Improper charging of meals or food items to students
 - Improper claiming, meal counting, reimbursement, or fraud
 - Improper business practices of the sponsor, site, or vendor
 - Concerns related to improper staffing or supervising of program operations
 - False information accusations
 - Health or safety concerns
 - Fraudulent activity
 - Noncompliance of federal or state program requirements
 - Other complaints related to the Child Nutrition programs

4. Directors are notified within three business days when a new complaint is received related to their assigned CNP duties if they do not receive the complaint directly. The director reviews the complaint to determine the next steps in a potential investigation. The director may need to reach out to the complainant to gather more information or ask specific questions about the allegations. The director must log the complaint and note when it was received, who is the complainant, what are the allegations, program operators involved, and other specific details pertinent to the complaint. If the complainant is known and has provided their contact information, the director should contact them to acknowledge receipt of their complaint.
5. When reviewing a complaint, the director should take into consideration whether the complainant should be kept confidential, whether there are any conflicts of interest for the director related to the complaint, if the complaint is aimed at a SCN employee, or if there are any other unique considerations that should be taken into account if an investigation should proceed.
6. Complainants are kept confidential from program operators to the maximum extent possible. Exceptions may include resolving a situation for a specific program participant or when complainant requests that SCN assist in reaching a resolution between the parties identified in the complaint.
7. Complaints allegations that are not related to CNP operations may be routed to their appropriate agency, such as child care licensing concerns to the Family and Social Services Administration. If the complainant is reporting allegations of child abuse or neglect, the SCN employee who has received the complaint should direct the complainant to DCS's report [hotline](#).
8. If the allegations affect other State agency nutrition programs operations (i.e. allegations that a sponsor is violating nutrition requirements in Indiana and neighboring States where they also operate), the director should determine whether the allegations should also be reported to the State agency in question or the USDA Midwest Regional Office.
9. While the assigned director may need to contact the alleged violator to gather information, the director should limit any dissemination of information from the complaint that may harm the complainant or hinder any potential investigation.
10. Complaints are examined thoroughly for as much information as possible to understand the situation. The assigned director will reach out to all parties to gain an understanding of the allegations. The director may conduct an in-person or virtual visit with either party if necessary. The director may also delegate a visit to the assigned field specialist. This visit may be announced or unannounced.

11. When investigating a complaint, the division should consider the following information to be gathered:
- Witness, complainant, and complaint subject interviews and written questionnaires
 - Compliance-focused onsite visits and reviews
 - Documentation of reviews, monitoring forms, previous reviews, financial audits, vendor contracts, attendance and meal claim records
 - Analysis of trends in meal claims and reimbursements.
12. The investigation should be conducted independently to the maximum extent possible. Points of consideration include:
- Determining the level of access or “need to know basis” for SCN employees and the and potential sensitive nature of the complaint. This may include CNP participant or family personal information, if a complaint involves SCN employees, or if the information provided is protected by confidentiality laws
 - If the complaint is related to an SCN employee, whether any investigation should be conducted by a director that does not supervise the employee
 - Whether personnel identified in the complaint are relatives of SCN employees
- If the complaint is related to an SCN employee, whether the employee has access to the complaint and any related documentation in the shared drives.
13. All complaint documentation collected should be stored in the appropriate CNP folder and accessible to the SCN Director.
14. A summary should be completed upon conclusion of the investigation. The summary should include:
- all dates of communication and who was interviewed
 - documentation gathered for the investigation
 - a summary of complaint
 - a summary of investigation, including findings
 - a determination of whether the allegations are substantiated or unsubstantiated
 - any action taken as a result of the investigation
 - any additional relevant information from the activities conducted in response to the complaint.
15. If the complaint is substantiated, the director will determine if and what type of corrective action is required and if a follow-up review will be conducted to ensure corrective action is in place. If the investigation leads to increased concerns, the investigation can be turned into a special review in which official findings and corrective action can be required.
16. If appropriate, a verbal or written notice should be sent to the complainant and the organization identified in the complaint to indicate a complaint was received, an investigation

was conducted, the determination, and if any further action is needed. The notice will be saved in the appropriate online folder.

17. The director or assigned field specialist may conduct a post-investigation site visit to discuss the findings with the organization, provide technical assistance, and discuss any required corrective action.

Sources: 7 CFR 210.19(a)(4), 7 CFR 215.11(e), 7 CFR 220.13(c), 7 CFR 225.11(b), 7 CFR 226.6(n), 7 CFR 250.15(d)