

John Bennett Creative Services *for Child Nutrition Professionals*

*Below are some talking points you can use if you are asked by your board, local media, or other groups to **comment on a price increase** caused by the new federal regs. Look these points over carefully, and **revise carefully to fit your situation** or call us for a revision, or further help.*

Keep in mind that it is always acceptable, when a reporter calls, to tell him or her that you are taking care of something right now and to please give you a number to call back in just a few minutes. Then, gather your thoughts and composure, look over the talking points again, and call back promptly.

It's also acceptable to use the talking points when addressing the media as a group or individually. Get to know the material and try not to simply read, but use the points to refer to and keep yourself on track.

Finally, don't feel pressured to say more than you know or can accurately say. Stay "on message" and stick to the points below, even if you have to repeat key phrases, and resist the all-too-human urge to blather on. Say what you have to say and then stop – it's up to them to frame a new question, so don't let them use "the roaring silence" to get you to keep going kind of aimlessly.

Try to come off as accommodating and eager to help, rather than defensive or trying to hide something.

VERY IMPORTANT -- We've also included, in a separate, editable file, a version of these talking points that you can send to a reporter or distribute as a summary of the reasons for the price increase and your thoughts on the issue.

AND PLEASE – call or contact us if you need more extensive or specific help or preparation.

Talking points:

1. For the first time ever, school districts like ours across the country are being required to raise prices for students who pay full price for lunch. This requirement does not affect students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunches. **As I will explain, these changes should help us continue to make sure our kids are well-nourished and ready to learn.**
2. Over the years, the federal reimbursement for free lunches has gone up little by little --very slowly, mind you, and not always adequately to cover the cost of preparing and serving a nutritious meal, but nonetheless the reimbursement has gone up by small amounts fairly regularly. Right now, school nutrition programs in the National School Lunch program receive **a total of two-dollars-and-seventy-two-cents** for each complete meal we serve to students eligible for a free lunch.
3. **But most school nutrition programs, like ours, have not raised the price for paid lunches at the same pace** – lunch for our paying students last school year cost ___ for elementary school kids, ___ for middle school, and ___ for high school. In some other school districts, the disparity between paid prices and the \$2.72 reimbursement for free meals is even greater, so that, in effect, **the cost of paid meals has been kept artificially low with the support of the free-meal reimbursements.**
4. So the new federal regulations which take effect this year will **require the average paid lunch cost in a district to rise gradually over the next five years until the average price equals the free-meal reimbursement.** This year, that requirement begins to kick in for districts in which the average price for paying students is below two-dollars-and-forty-six cents. Our average is about ____, so in order to begin to meet that mandate, we are asking that elementary paid lunches in _____ increase from ____ to ____, middle school lunches from ____ to ____, and high school lunches from ____ to _____. **In subsequent years, we will need to increase our prices gradually until, on average, our paid price equals the reimbursement for free meals.**

5. We last raised prices in 2008 by 25 cents across the board, but that was a very different situation. Then, we were confronted simultaneously by three daunting cost drivers – higher fuel prices, higher food costs, and our commitment to providing more nutritious foods (like whole grains, 100% juices, and more fresh fruits and vegetables), which, of course, also cost more. We prepare and serve _____ meals each day without any direct funding from local taxes or our school board, and with very little margin for error, and when we were confronted with an unprecedented increase in our costs, suddenly and from so many different directions at once, we had no choice but to ask for a price increase.
6. This time, we're not asking for an emergency increase – we're managing the program well and paying our own way as a food service department, just as the board wants us to do. Instead, this time **we will be able to use any additional revenues from the mandated price increase to help meet the new nutrition requirements** that are also part of the changes in federal regulations for the National School Lunch Program.
7. These changes, part of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, will help us add **more fresh fruits and vegetables**, and even cut back on starchy veggies like potatoes and corn in favor of **healthier options like squash, carrots, broccoli, and leafy greens**. We'll also be further **reducing sodium, limiting the calorie content of ala carte items**, and, within two years, **making whole grains standard** for all grain products we serve.
8. So, while we're always reluctant to raise prices and are acutely sensitive to the hardship even a small increase can cause for some families, we hope that this increase will have **an immediate positive impact** by allowing us to provide even healthier meals, so that all of our kids can continue to realize the many positive educational benefits of good nutrition. **We're here for one reason – to help kids learn as well as they possibly can– and these changes should help us continue to fulfill that paramount mission.**