

# A content and thematic analysis of lunch shaming in the news media

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## Background

- Lunch shaming is the stigmatization of students that are unable to pay for their school meals.
- The phenomenon of lunch shaming is frequently highlighted in the media.

## Methods

- Content analysis of national, international, and local online, print, broadcast news
- Retrieved from five news media databases using predetermined search terms.
- Two trained coders analyzed the news stories for common themes

## Results

- 355 news stories were analyzed; 73.5% came from local print newspapers
- 54.9% of stories mentioned state or national policies on lunch shaming

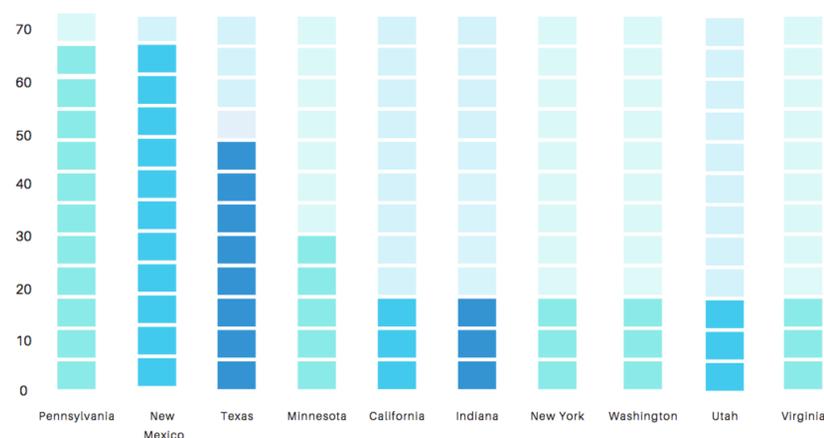
## Conclusion

- Lunch shaming remains a major problem
- Awareness of how the media is portrays lunch-shaming may provide insight into how school districts and foodservice directors can target their communication
- Strategies need to be considered to remedy this phenomenon

Themes	Count of Stories	Example Quotes
Debt Reported	139	"In the City School District of the City of New York, for example, several years of uncollected meal payments led to the accumulation of \$42 million in debt."
Specific Incidences	99	"Cable news commentators and Salt Lake City residents quickly agreed that the city's Uintah Elementary School did not handle students unpaid meal balances properly when an employee took the students freshly served lunches out of their hands and threw them in a trash can in view of their classmates last month."
Parent Barriers	126	"Kids can eat for free if a family of four earns less than about \$32,000 a year or at a discount if earnings are under \$45,000. It's households with slightly higher incomes that are more likely to struggle, experts on poverty and nutrition say."
Debt Collection	53	"In Minnesota, Anoka-Hennepin School District officials plan to hire a collection agency to pursue approximately \$160,000 in unpaid breakfast and lunch money."
Extreme Situations	13	"If there is no resolution, school administration or a social worker may complete an application for a child known to be eligible. For those where financial need is not able to be determined, the school administration may notify Children's Protective Services."
Parent Blaming	56	"If you're not going to feed your kids, you can't expect other people to do that."
Donations	123	"An anonymous donor paid off \$13,250 in school lunch debts for 148 elementary students whose families had difficulty paying off negative balances."
State-level Policy	195	"New Mexico has passed a law said to be the first of its kind, banning 'lunch shaming.'"
District level-Policy	164	"The Vigo County School District this year implemented a controversial new procedure for those who charge meals. Under the procedure, students on paid lunches would be allowed to charge only three meals before they are given an 'alternate' meal."



Lunch Shaming Incidence by State, Top 10



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