

Unpaid School Meal Charges

The District adopts the following policy to ensure District employees, families, and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding meal charges. The policy seeks to allow students to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day, avoid identifying to other students or bystanders students with insufficient funds to pay for school meals, and maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

Unpaid Meal Charges

When a student's school meal account funds are exhausted, a student paying the full or reduced price for meals may charge no more than 3 meals to his or her school meal account. Students may charge breakfasts and/or lunches and/or afternoon snacks up to the maximum amount. Charging of a la carte or extra items to a student's account will not be permitted.

Students who have charged the maximum amount allowed will not be allowed to charge further meals until the negative account balance has been paid in full. However, such students will be allowed to purchase a meal if the student pays for the meal when it is received.

Students who have charged the maximum amount and cannot pay out of pocket for a meal will be provided an alternate meal which meets the federal requirements for reimbursement. Alternate meals shall be provided for breakfasts and/or lunches and/or afternoon snacks. This meal shall be provided at no cost. Such alternate meals shall be provided no more than 3 times per school year.

Students who qualify for free meals shall never be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a negative balance from previous purchases.

The District will make reasonable efforts to notify families when meal account balances reach \$10.00, prior to going into a negative balance. If an account does have a negative balance, additional communications will be advanced to the family in order to seek payment for the negative fund balance and to re-establish a positive account balance for the student's use. At least one written warning shall be provided to a student and his or her parent or guardian prior to denying meals for exceeding the District's charge limit. Families will be notified by automated calling system and/or a letter sent home with the student and/or by mail and/or by email].

This notice may include a copy or description of this policy and information regarding how to apply for free or reduced price meals, including contact information for who can help them with the application process. Active efforts to encourage eligible households to apply for free or reduced lunch may be used to prevent meal charges.

If payment of the negative balance is not received within 30 days of the maximum charge limit being attained, the debt will be turned over to the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee for collection. If the debt is not paid within 30 days of mailing the final notice of the negative account balance, it shall be considered bad debt for the purposes of federal law concerning unpaid meal charges. Such bad debt must be restored using non-federal funds, from sources such as the District's general fund, special funding from state or local governments, or other sources.

Efforts to collect payment may include use of collection agencies, small claims court, or any other method permitted by law, provided the benefits of potential collections outweigh the costs incurred to achieve those collections.

Students and parents/guardians of students are encouraged to prepay meal costs. Payments for school meals may be made by:

1. Bringing payment to the school OR District office;
2. Making payment on the District website

Notification

The District will provide a copy of this policy to all households at the start of school each year and to families and students that transfer into the District at the time of transfer. All District staff responsible for enforcing any aspect of the policy shall also receive a copy of this policy. It may also be communicated to school social workers, school nurses, the homeless liaison, or other staff members who may assist students in need. The District may also make this policy available in student handbooks, on the District website, or by other means deemed appropriate.

Records

Records of how and when this policy is communicated to households and staff will be retained.

The District shall also retain documentation of the handling of bad debt, including:

1. Evidence of efforts to collect unpaid meal charges in accordance with this policy;
2. Evidence the collection efforts fell within the timeframe and methods established by this policy;
3. Financial documentation showing when the unpaid meal charge(s) became an operating loss; and
4. Evidence any funds written off as bad debt were restored to the nonprofit school food service account using non-Federal sources.

Cross Reference: 4175 Required Annual Notices

Legal References: SP 46-2016 Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies, United States Department of Agriculture

Other References: 2017 Edition: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation’s Schools, United States Department of Agriculture;
Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance Q&As, March 23, 2017, United States Department of Agriculture.

Policy History:

Adopted on: 08/21/2023

Revised on:

Reviewed on: