

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 \$50.00 to the family meal account. Students may charge breakfasts and/or lunches up to the maximum amount. Charging of a la carte or extra items to a student's account will not be permitted. No adults will be allowed to charge meals.

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.

When a student has charged the maximum amount and cannot pay out of pocket for a meal, the Child Nutrition Director will be notified, and the student will be provided a meal. The school administrator will send a free/reduced application home with the student. Family accounts with a negative balance in excess of the limit (\$50.00) will be handled on an individual basis by the parent(s) and Child Nutrition Director.

Students at the Middle and High School levels will not be permitted to charge the last two weeks of school. They may, however, bring cash to pay for their meals each day, without paying the full amount of the negative balance in their family meal account; or additionally, they may help in the kitchen and will be provided a labor meal. Each kitchen will have a list of duties that qualify for a labor meal. In addition, High School students must pay the full amount of the negative balance in their family account before the kitchen will sign their check out slips at the end of the school year.

If a family account has a negative balance, communication will be sent to the family via email in order to seek payment and re-establish a positive account balance. If a negative balance reaches \$50.00, it will be turned over to the school administrator to make contact with parent or guardian.

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 the Child Nutrition Director, 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 the debt is not paid within 7 days of the end of school, 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, District office or Child Nutrition office;
2. Making payment on the MyMealTime website, www.mymealtime.com.

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.

Charitable Assistance

The District may establish an unpaid meal charges fund to cover the cost of unpaid meal charges. Charitable groups, individuals, school fundraisers, and others may donate to this fund. Parents/guardians of children who pay the full amount for school meals and who have funds left

over in their school meals account at the end of the school year may be offered the option of donating these funds to the unpaid meal charges fund.

If the District chooses to establish an unpaid meal charges fund, the Superintendent or his or her designee shall establish procedures for the use of such funds.

Other Reference: 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

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

Policy History:

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