

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

Parents and/or Guardians will be held responsible for ALL unpaid meal charges until accounts are paid in full.

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, will be provided at the start of each school year and to the families and students that transfer into the District at the time of transfer. Applications may be applied for at any time during the school year. Active efforts to encourage eligible households to apply for free or reduced lunch will be used to prevent meal charges.

Parents and/or Guardians are asked to pre-pay accounts monthly by using the pre-calculated amounts for F/R and Full paid student amounts printed in each monthly newsletter. Payments for school meals may be made by: bringing payment to the District office and/or school lunchroom, making payment on the District website electronically or with a debit/credit card at the District office.

The District will make reasonable efforts to notify families when meal account balances are low or at maximum charging amounts however, it is the responsibility of parents and/or guardians to make sure lunch accounts are current throughout the school year.

When a student's school meal account funds are exhausted, a student may charge no more than \$100.00 to his or her school meal account. The Parent and/or Guardian will be given (30) days to pay in full or make reasonable payment arrangements in writing. Until the meal accounts are paid in full, parents and/or guardians are requested to send students with home lunches.

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

Any debt over \$100.00 not collected by the end of the current school year will be turned over to collection agencies and/or small claims court and 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.

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

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 the 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.

[OPTIONAL: 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. Only Parent and/or Guardians who have made a reasonable effort to make payments on unpaid meal account will be allowed to use these 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:

Adopted on: July 17, 2019

Revised on: June 16, 2020

Reviewed on: