

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 \$25 to his or her school meal account. Students who have charged the maximum amount allowed will be allowed to charge further meals until the negative account balance has been paid in full. Such students will be allowed to purchase a meal if the student pays for the meal when it is received. Students will not be identified at the point of purchase if their account has a negative balance by providing an alternative meal or other announcement.

The District will make reasonable efforts to notify families when meal account balances reach five dollars, 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. 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. Efforts to collect the unpaid balance may include collection upon withdrawal from the school or graduation.

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

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 school personnel 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 60 days of the maximum charge limit being attained, the debt may be turned over to the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee for collection. If the debt is not paid within 60 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 office,
2. Making payment by mail,
3. by credit card by phone or other electronic means as may be adopted.

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.



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: 9/11/2017

Revised on: