

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 ten (10) meals. 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 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 a meal which meets the federal requirements for reimbursement. Meals shall be provided for breakfasts and/or lunches and/or afternoon snacks. This meal shall be provided at no cost.

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 twenty dollars (\$20), 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 a letter sent home with the student, by mail and/or by email.

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.

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: January 12, 2015

Revised on: April 9, 2018

Revised on: January 11, 2021