

CHARGING SCHOOL MEALS

The Board of Education recognizes that on occasion, students may not have enough funds for a meal. To ensure that students do not go hungry, but also to promote responsible student behavior and minimize the fiscal burden to the district, the Board will allow students who do not have enough funds to “charge” the cost of meals to be paid back at a later date subject to the terms in this policy.

To comply with State guidelines and maintain a system for accounting for charged meals, regarding both full and reduced-price meals, the Board shall:

1. allow only regular reimbursable meals to be charged, excluding extras, à la carte items, and snacks (“competitive foods”);
2. limit the number of charges to five per student per year in the elementary grades, 5 per student per year in middle school, and 5 per student per year in high school. However, any student with charged meals remaining unpaid at the end of the school year may not charge meals the next school year until the previous charges are paid; and
3. use a computer-generated point of sale system, which identifies and records all meals as well as collects repayments.

Charged meals must be counted and claimed for reimbursement on the day that the student charged (received) the meal, not the day the charge is paid back. When charges are paid, these monies are not to be considered “à la carte” transactions, as a section on the daily cash report or deposit summary reads “charges paid.”

Students who have reached the limit of “charged” meals may be offered an “alternate” meal determined by the district. The district shall take into consideration extenuating circumstances. The cost of the alternate meal, though less than the regular meal, shall be added to the student’s account. Alternate meals shall be provided as discretely as possible, before a student obtains a regular meal.

Students eligible for free meals shall not be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a negative balance from other cafeteria purchases. No student with unpaid charges will be prohibited from purchasing food if they have money that day.

A student who has abused this policy can be refused a meal. Such a refusal is not considered to be a violation of any state or federal laws concerning school food programs. However before denying any student a meal, school food authorities (SFAs) shall carefully consider the negative consequences of such an action. Refusing very young children or students with disabilities is prohibited by the Board.

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If SFAs suspect that a student may be abusing this policy, written notice will be provided to the parent that if he/she continues to abuse this policy, the privilege of charging meals will be refused.

The district's payment system allows for automatic replenishment when a balance reaches a certain amount set by the parent/guardian. The district shall encourage parents/guardians to utilize this option.

Parents shall be discretely notified of student account balances regularly. When a student's account balance falls to \$5.00 and whenever a meal is charged, the district will discretely notify the student and the parent/guardian of the balance, the process to refill the account, and the district's policy on charging school meals and alternate meals. This notification will continue regularly until the account is replenished. Parents must repay all unpaid charges remaining at the end of the year or before their child leaves the district, whichever occurs first.

The district shall discretely notify parents of students regularly with negative balances of the application process for free and/or reduced price meals. If a parent regularly fails to provide meal money and does not qualify for free or reduced price meals, the district may take other activities as appropriate, including notifying the local department of social services if neglect is suspected.

The school district shall notify all parents/guardians in writing on an annual basis at the start of the school year and to families transferring during the year, outlining the requirements of this policy. The policy shall also be published in appropriate school and district publications. All staff involved in implementing and enforcing this policy shall also be notified of these requirements and their responsibilities.

Unpaid Meal Charges and Debt Collection

Unpaid meal charges are a financial burden to the district and taxpayers and can negatively affect the school program. Unpaid meal charges shall be considered "delinquent" as per the district's accounting practices. The district shall attempt to recover unpaid meal charges before the end of the school year, but may continue efforts into the next school year. Students with unpaid meal charges at the start of the year will not be able to charge meals. The district shall notify parents/guardians of unpaid meal charges at regular intervals, and may engage in collection activities. The district shall offer repayment plans, and may take other actions that do not result in harm or shame to the child, until unpaid charges are paid.

Account Balances

Remaining funds will be carried over to the next school year. When students leave the district or graduate, the district will attempt to contact the parent/guardian to return remaining funds. Parents/guardians may request that funds be transferred to other students (e.g., siblings,

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unpaid accounts). All transfer requests must be in writing. Unclaimed funds remaining after three months shall be absorbed by the school meal account.

Staff

Staff members are allowed to purchase food from the district's food services. However, all purchases must be paid for on a monthly basis.

Cross-ref: 8520, Free and Reduced Price Meal Services

Ref: 42 USC §1779 (Child Nutrition Act of 1966)
42 USC §§1758(f)(1); 1766(a) (National School Lunch Act)
2 CFR §200.426 (accounting for debt in federal programs)
7 CFR §§210.9 210.12; 210.19; 220.13; 245.5 (accounting in federal school meal programs)
Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (Public Law 111-296), §143
USDA Report to Congress, *Review of Local Policies on Meal Charges and Provision of Alternate Meals*, June 2016, www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/unpaidmealcharges-report.pdf
Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies, USDA FNS Memo SP 46-2016 (07/08/16), www.fns.usda.gov/unpaid-meal-charges-local-meal-charge-policies
Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A, USDA FNS Memo SP 57-2016 (09/16/16), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP57-2016os.pdf>
Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A, USDA FNS Memo SP 23-2017 (03/23/17), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP23-2017os.pdf>
Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments, USDA FNS Memo SP 47-2016 (07/08/16), www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP47-2016os.pdf
Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge - Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools, USDA FNS Guidance Document (May 2017), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP29-2017a1.pdf>
Student Meal Charge Policy, NYSED Guidance Memo, (5/30/17), <http://www.cn.nysed.gov/content/student-meal-charge-policy>

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