

8000 – NONINSTRUCTIONAL OPERATIONS

Unpaid School Meal Charge

8205

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 bystander's 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 three meals to his or her school meal account. Students may charge breakfasts and/or lunches and/or afternoon snacks up to the maximum amount.

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.

Students who have charged the maximum amount and cannot pay out of pocket for a meal will be provided an alternate meal which meets the federal requirements for reimbursement.

The District shall place the cashier station before the serving area to avoid requiring a student to return a meal if they are found to have reached the maximum charge amount.

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 Board directs the Superintendent to draft a procedure detailing the manner in which notice of low account balances shall be given;

First Charge: 1. The cashier will notify the student.

Second Charge: 1. The cashier will notify the student.

2. The cashier will email a letter with the negative balance to the parent/guardian.

Third Charge: 1. The cashier will notify the student.

2. The cashier will email a letter with the negative balance to the parent/guardian.

3. The cashier will call to inform parent/guardian the child(ren) will not be able to receive food services until the account is current.

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The District will make reasonable efforts to notify families when meal account balances are low. The District will make reasonable efforts to collect unpaid meal charges. At least one written warning shall be provided to a student and his or her parent/guardian prior to denying meals for exceeding the District's charge limit. Families will be notified by a phone call and/or a letter sent home with the student and/or by mail and/or by email.

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 [federal programs 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 payment of the negative balance is not received by the end of the school year, the debt will be turned over to the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee for collection. If the debt is not paid within 30 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 OR District office;
2. Making payment on the District website;

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

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4. Evidence any funds written off as bad debt were restored to the nonprofit school food service account using non-Federal sources.

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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Revised on:

Reviewed: 9/24/2025