

325.4 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 bystander students with insufficient funds to pay for school meals, and maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

When a student's school meal account balance reaches zero or below, a student paying the full or reduced price for meals may not continue to charge to his or her school meal account. Students who have a meal account with a balance of zero or below will be encouraged and allowed to bring a meal from home. Students who qualify for free meals shall never be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a zero or negative balance from previous purchases.

Unpaid Meal Charges

The District will make reasonable efforts to notify families when a meal account balance reaches zero 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. At least one written warning shall be provided to a student and his or her parent or guardian prior to denying meals for exceeding the District's charge limit. 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.

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 the debt will be turned over to the School District Business Manager and the Point of Service person for collection. If the debt is not paid 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 setting up payment plans to bring the balance to zero in the course of the school. Or in the event that the balance has not been paid in full before the beginning of the start of the following school year, the student will not be allowed to participate in the food service program until the account is paid in full. Parent or guardian will be notified that they are responsible to send a meal with their child from home for lunch each day. Students, parents, and guardians of students are encouraged to prepay meal costs. Payments for school meals may be made by bringing payment to the school office.

Notification

The District will provide a copy of this policy to all households at the start of school each year during the registration process 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 for documentation.

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.

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

Adopted: October, 2017