

Unpaid Meal Charge Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent meal account procedures throughout the District. Unpaid charges place a financial strain on the Food Service Department. The goals of this policy are:

- To treat all students with dignity in the serving line regarding meal accounts;
- To support positive interactions with District staff, students and parents/guardians to the maximum extent possible;
- To establish protocols that are age appropriate;
- To encourage parents/guardians to assume responsibility of meal payments and to promote self-responsibility of the student; and
- To establish consistent District protocols and procedures regarding meal charges and collection of charges.

Scope of Responsibility

- **Food Service Department:** Responsible for maintaining charge records and notifying the building principal and/or District of outstanding balances. Responsible for sending parents/guardians an automatic notification through the Point of Sale system (Meal Magic) via email.
- **Parents/Guardians:** Responsible for providing immediate payment.

Preventing Meal Charges - Eligibility for Free and Reduced Meals

To ensure that all eligible families are certified for free and reduced-price school meals, the Food Service Department shall:

- Provide all households with school meal applications prior to the start of the school year and/or instructions for completing online school meal applications. A household may apply for benefits at any time during the school year. Only one application is required for all children in the household
- Provide school meal applications in the primary language of the parent/guardian and provide assistance with completing an application for any household that request assistance;
- Promptly utilize data provided by the state or other school district officials to certify eligible children without an application;
- Assure that any child for which the school district is not able to obtain a completed school meal application, but becomes aware of their eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals shall be certified based on an application submitted by the appropriate school official, as permitted by USDA guidance.
- A student's status as eligible for free and reduced price meals shall carry over into the next school year for thirty (30) days from the start of school attendance

Payment of Meals and Meal Charges

Students may charge meals in accordance with the following rules:

- Students are expected to pay for meals at the school's published meal rate each day. Families are expected to maintain funds in accounts to minimize the possibility that a child may be without meal money on any given day. Families may add money to students' accounts through the district's online payment page (Meal Magic Family Portal) or they may send students with cash or checks to deposit into their accounts. If a parent/guardian chooses to send in one payment that is to be divided between sibling accounts, the parent/guardian must specify how the funds are to be distributed to the students' accounts. Funds may not be transferred between sibling accounts unless permission is received from the parent/guardian.

- Students may charge complete reimbursable meals only. No student with a negative account balance will be allowed to purchase any a la carte items, including second meals, snacks, or drinks other than milk.
- **Charging is for emergencies.** The meal account charge system is required by the State of Ohio. It is intended to be used for the **occasional** time when a child does not have sufficient funds in their meal account or does not have money with them. This is **NOT** a revolving charge account, like a store credit card would be, and the meal account balance is the responsibility of the parent/guardian.
- Students will be allowed to charge a maximum of \$10.00 at the Elementary or Intermediate School and \$15.00 at the Middle or High School for **Reimbursable Meals only.**
- If charges exceed the \$10 or \$15 limit, and a parent/guardian does not respond to communication sent, an alternative meal will be provided. The meal provided will be based on available options from the Food Service Department, the age of the student, and in adherence to student food restrictions/allergies. The alternative meal will consist of a ham or turkey sandwich, fruit and/or vegetable, and milk of choice.
- All charges not paid before the end of the school year will be carried forward into the next school year.
- Graduating seniors must pay all charges in full. Failure to do so may result in not being allowed to participate in end-of-year activities.
- All students will be provided with meal charge opportunities pursuant to this policy, regardless of whether they receive full price, reduced price, or free meals.

Low or Negative Account Balance Notification

To ensure that households are aware of negative account balances and the potential to accrue meal debt, the Food Service Department will:

- Send out low balance notices prior to students needing to charge meals. Low balance emails are sent automatically through the Meal Magic system when a student's meal account has a balance of \$5.00 or below
- Notify and/or work with principals, school counselors, and/or teachers to understand the student and parent's situation and if a school meal application is needed
- Communication methods for notifying families may include automated emails, phone calls, or letters. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program.

Communication of Policy

This policy and any pertinent supporting information shall be provided via:

- Posted on the school district's website at the beginning of the school year
- All school district personnel who are responsible for enforcing this policy