

Lower Merion School District

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

Policy: 812
Section: OPERATIONS
Title: NUTRITIONAL SERVICES
Date Adopted: 6/12/2017
Date Last Revised: 1/10/25; 1/23/23; 9/14/18; 2/9/2018

R812 NUTRITIONAL SERVICES

School Meal Account Procedures / Meal Charging Policy

Confidentiality

A student’s meal status is always kept confidential. All students have individual accounts to purchase their meals and are treated the same at the register.

School Charge Policy

Students are not permitted to charge a-la-carte or other non-program foods when their individual student school meal accounts lack sufficient funds to cover the cost of the items.

Parents/guardians are required to cover negative balances incurred by the student. Parents/guardians may request in writing that the District restrict their child’s purchase of a la carte items and/or school meals at any time. A school meal account is considered delinquent when there are five or more unpaid meals on the account.

The procedures for notifying parents/guardians of negative balances and collecting negative balances are detailed below. However, students will be permitted to charge one breakfast meal and one lunch meal per day and will not be denied a meal on account of the insufficient funds in their student meal accounts, unless the District is directed in writing by the student’s parent/guardian.

Students may not be publicly identified or stigmatized, or required to perform chores or other work when they cannot pay or have a negative student meal account balance. Student will not be required to discard a school meal after it has been served to the student, even if the student is unable to pay for the meal or has a negative student meal account balance. Student will not be required to eat a different lunch than their peers when they have a negative balance. Students with negative balances will not be allowed to charge a-la-carte items. It shall not constitute public identification or stigmatization of a student for a school to restrict privileges and activities of students who owe money for school meals if those same restrictions apply to students who owe money for other school-related purposes.

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While the District is required to charge for meals and to follow the below-listed procedures in the event of negative meal account balances, the District will strive to ensure that steps taken to inform students and families of negative meal account balances and attempts to collect delinquent meal account debt are done so respectfully and in full commitment to the principles of the District’s commitment to equity.

See Board Policy No. 808 Nutritional Services – Free and Reduced Priced Meals for Students, as well as Board Policies & Administrative Regulations No. 101 Equity and No. 152 Participation in Curricular Programs and Activities by Economically Disadvantaged Students for additional explanation and examples of the District’s equity-driven approach.

Negative Balance Notification Procedures

Parents/guardians are advised of their child’s negative account balance via periodic automated correspondence. Such correspondence may also be in the form of a notice or letter that is delivered by the student, so long as the letter is addressed to the student’s parents/guardians.

In accordance with state statute, when a student owes money for five (5) or more school meals, the District shall offer assistance to the student’s parents/guardians to assist their application for participation in the school food program. This will typically take the form of embedding notice into routine correspondence with parents.

School staff may communicate a low balance or money owed by a student for school meals to a student in grades 9-12; such communication shall be made on an individual basis and in a discreet manner.

Negative student school meal account balances may be referred by the school cafeteria managers to the Director of Nutritional Services. The Director of Nutritional Services or his/her designee shall contact such parents/guardians directly via phone call and/or electronic communication to make payment arrangements. The District reserves the right to assess finance charges and collection costs on outstanding balances, and to refer such balances to outside authorities or agencies to the extent permitted by law.

Graduating seniors will receive written correspondence regarding negative balances that need to be paid prior to graduation.

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Additional Information

Student Services shall notify Nutritional Services regarding departing students so that account balances can be rectified prior to their departure.

Information on meal prices, menus, how to apply for free or reduced priced meals, how to check a school meal account balance or add funds to such accounts can be found on the District's Nutritional Services webpage at <http://www.lmsd.org/departments/nutritional/index.aspx>.

Delinquent School Meal Account Debt

A school meal account is considered delinquent when there are five or more unpaid meals on the account.

After taking reasonable steps to collect delinquent school meal debt, which shall include at least two (2) written correspondences to the student's parent/guardian, unrecovered/delinquent debt at the end of each school year shall be referred to the Business Manager for appropriate action.

Such unrecovered/delinquent debt shall be considered bad debt and non-federal funding sources must repay the Food Service Fund for the total amount of such unrecovered/delinquent debt.

Delinquent school meal debt shall not be classified as bad debt for write off purposes until after reasonable steps have been taken to collect such delinquent school meal debt.

Donation of Funds for the Benefit of Students

From time to time, parents/guardians or other individuals may choose to donate funds to the District for the benefit of students who have insufficient funds in their individual meal accounts. Such donated funds must have a separate account or funding number to ensure such funds are not comingled with food service revenue funds from federal and state sources or food sales.

At the end of the school year, parents/guardians whose children have positive meal account balances at the end of the school year may elect to donate such funds to cover negative student meal account balances. Donations from the positive meal account balances may stay within the Food Service Fund so long as they are transferred to an account/fund designated for donations to students.

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Distribution

This Administrative Regulation, detailing the District’s local meal charge policy, shall be provided in writing to each household at the beginning of the school year, and during the school year to households who transfer to the District during the school year.

Reference:

- 24 P.S. § 13-1337(d)(3)(ii)
- Board Policy No. 808 Nutritional Services – Free and Reduced Priced Meals for Students
- Board Policy & Administrative Regulation No. 152 – Participation in Curricular Programs and Activities by Economically Disadvantaged Students