

FOOD SERVICE CHARGING POLICY

The goal of the food service program is to provide students with nutritious and healthy foods, through the District's food services program, that will enhance learning. The school nutrition program is an essential part of the education system and by providing good-tasting, nutritious meals in pleasant surroundings; we are helping to teach students the value of good nutrition.

The Board of Education (Board) has an agreement with the Connecticut State Department of Education to participate in one or more school Child Nutrition Programs and accepts full responsibility for adhering to the federal and state guidelines and regulations pertaining to these school Child Nutrition Programs. The Board also accepts full responsibility for providing free or reduced price meals to eligible students enrolled in Regional School District No. 7 schools. Applicants for such meals are responsible to pay for meals until the application for the free or reduced price meals is completed and approved. All applications for free and reduced price meals and any related information will be considered strictly confidential and not to be shared outside of the District's food services program. Meals are planned to meet the specified nutrient standards outlined by the United States Department of Agriculture for children based on their age and grade group.

Although not required by law, because of the District's participation in the Child Nutrition Programs, the Board approves the establishment of a system to allow a student to charge a meal.

The Board realizes that funds from the non-profit school food service account, according to federal regulations, cannot be used to cover the cost of charged meals that have not been paid.

Moreover, federal funds are intended to subsidize the meals of children and may not be used to subsidize meals for adults (teachers, staff and visitors). Adults are not allowed to charge meals and shall pay for such meals at the time of service or through pre-paid accounts.

Charging is not encouraged by the District but on those occasions that a student does not have money, they will be offered an alternate meal after their second charged meal. Alternate meals will include appropriate components so they will be claimed for reimbursement. Examples of alternate meals include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A whole grain bagel with cream cheese, fruit or vegetable and milk, or
- A peanut butter & jelly sandwich, fruit or vegetable and milk

The cost of providing this alternate lunch cannot be incurred by the school food service account and the charge for this alternate meal will be charged to the students account.

In order to sustain the District's food services program, the District cannot permit the excessive charging of student meals. Therefore, any charging of meals must be consistent with this policy and any accompanying regulations. The Superintendent and/or his designee shall develop regulations designed to effectively and respectfully address family responsibility for unpaid meals.

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Any parent/guardian who anticipates a problem with paying for meals is encouraged to contact the Food Services Manager/Director and/or the applicable School Principal for assistance. The Board encourages all families who may have a child eligible for free or reduced price meals to apply.

Definitions

“Alternate Meals” are not clearly defined in federal and state regulations. The use of alternate meals refers to any meal served to a student that is different from the day’s advertised reimbursable meal. Alternate meals are most often provided to those students who have forgotten their meal payment(s) or medium of exchange.

“Delinquent Debt” are unpaid meal charges, like any other money owed to the nonprofit school food service account when payment is overdue, as defined by state or local policies.

“Bad Debt” are when unpaid meal charges are not collected and are considered a loss. Such debt must be written off as an operating loss, which cannot be absorbed by the nonprofit school food service account, but must be restored using nonfederal funds.

1. Parents are responsible for providing meals or meal money for their student(s). Borrowing or charging is for up to 2 meals only in an emergency. Repayment is expected without delay. Snack and ala carte purchases are cash only.
2. Although not required by law, because of the District’s participation in the school Child Nutrition Programs, the Board of Education approves the establishment of a system to allow a student to charge a meal. The Board authorizes the Superintendent to develop rules which address:
 - a. What can be charged;
 - b. The limit on the number of charges per student;
 - c. The system used for identifying and recording charged meals;
 - d. The system used for collection of repayments; and
 - e. Ongoing communication of the policy to parents/guardians and students.

Delinquent Debt and Bad Debt

The District’s efforts to recover from households money owed due to the charging of meals must not have a negative impact on the children involved and shall focus primarily on the adults in the household responsible for providing funds for meal purchases. The school food authority is encouraged to consider whether the benefits of potential collections outweigh the costs which would be incurred to achieve those collections.

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Money owed because of unpaid meal charges shall be considered “delinquent debt,” as defined, as long as it is considered collectable and reasonable efforts are being made to collect it. Such debt must be paid by June 30, effective with the 2017-2018 school year.

After reasonable attempts are made to collect the delinquent debt, and it is determined that further collection efforts are useless or too costly, the debt must be reclassified as “bad debt.” Such debt shall be written off as an operating loss not to be absorbed by the nonprofit school food service account but must be restored using non-federal funds.

Dissemination of Policy

This policy shall be provided in writing to all households at the start of the school year and to households transferring to the school or school district during the school year.

This policy shall be included in the student/parent handbooks, on online portals that households use to access student accounts, placed on the District’s website, on the website of each school, and published at the beginning of each school year at the time information is distributed regarding free and reduced price meals and again to the household the first time the policy is applied to a specific child.

This policy shall be provided to all school staff and/or school food authority staff responsible for its enforcement. In addition, school social workers, nurses, the homeless liaison, and other staff members assisting children in need or who may be contacted by families with unpaid meal charges also should be informed of this policy.

The District’s school food authority shall maintain, as required, documentation of the methods used to communicate this policy to households and school or school food authority-level staff responsible for policy enforcement.

(c.f. 3542 – Food Service)

(cf. 3542.31 – Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes
 10-215 Lunches, breakfasts and other feeding programs for public
 school children and employees.

 10-215a Nonpublic school and nonprofit agency participation in feeding
 programs.

 10-215 b Duties of State Board of Education re feeing programs. State
 Board of Education Regulations

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State of Connecticut, Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education Operational Memorandum No. 4-17, "Guidance on Unpaid Meal Charges and Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments," November 2, 2016.

Operational Memorandum #19-10, State of Connecticut, Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education "Unallowable Charges to No-profit School Food Service Accounts and the Serving of Meals to No-paying Full and Reduced Price Students

National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program; Competitive Foods. (7CFR Parts 210 and 220, Federal Register, Vol 45 No. 20, Tuesday, January 29, 1980, pp 6758-6772.

USDA Guidance:

- SP 46-2016, "Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies"
- SP 47-2016, "Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payment"
- SP 57-2016 "Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q and A"
- SP 58-2016 "2016 Edition: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge Proven Strategies from our Nation's Schools"