



Gary Highsmith, Superintendent of Schools

Date: September 1, 2022

To: Parents/Guardians, Students, and Staff

Re: Food Service Meal Charging Policy

The Food Service Program at Hamden Public Schools is a self-supporting operation that must rely on meal payments and federal/state reimbursements for funding. Children participating in the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs receive a healthy, nutritious, meal that meets the USDA requirements for a reimbursable meal. Payments are made in advance or at the time of meal purchase.

Payment Responsibilities until Approval of Free and Reduced Priced Meal Application

Parents/Guardians who apply for free and reduced-price meal benefits are responsible for payment of all school meals and accumulated charges until approval is granted. Applications are provided to all families in the district prior to the school year. A new application needs to be completed each school year. Applications are available in the school offices and online at the Hamden Public Schools website: www.hamden.org/mealapplication.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires that all school districts participating in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast programs establish and clearly communicate their local meal charge policy at the beginning of the school year. The following notification outlines Hamden's Meal Charging Regulation and Procedure for the 2022-2023 school year. For information on the policy, please see **Business and Non-Instructional Operations Policy number 3542.43**, which is available online at the Hamden Public Schools website: <https://www.hamden.org/district-information/policies/policies-3000>.

MEAL CHARGING REGULATION

Hamden Public Schools Food Service Department utilizes a computerized system to manage students' personal meal accounts. Parents/Guardians are expected to maintain a positive balance on their child's account to avoid delinquent debt. The District uses MySchoolBucks.com, which is designed to extend families helpful services related to a child's school account information. These services include the ability to pre-pay for meals, view transaction history for up to 30 days, set-up low balance email alerts, and make payments online directly to a meal account. Negative balance status can be avoided by making a payment on the MySchoolBucks.com website.

For times when students do not have a positive balance in their meal account, and have

forgotten or lost their money, the Board of Education has established a system to allow a student to charge a meal. In order to sustain the District's food services program, the District cannot permit the excessive charging of student meals. However, all children will have the right to obtain a meal without delay, and they will not be publicly identified or shamed for any unpaid meal charges, nor will any disciplinary action be taken against such children.

Meal Charge Procedure

1. The District strongly discourages meal charges, but understands that an occasional emergency makes it necessary. We ask that charging privileges be exercised as infrequently as possible and not used as a payment practice. It is the responsibility of parents and caregivers to keep track of their student account balances and avoid negative balances. Meal balances could easily be tracked on the MySchoolBucks website, or by contacting the food services office (203-230-1010). The policy and procedures described here will be strictly enforced to eliminate unnecessary debt within the School Food Service Program.
2. Parents/Guardians are responsible for their child's lunch payment in advance or in the lunch line. Any student whose account has insufficient funds may charge up to three (3) meals. When this charge limit is reached, the student will receive the alternative hot lunch option each day, in accordance to their dietary restrictions, and the cost of this meal will be charged to the child's meal account. This practice will continue until the outstanding balance is paid in full. A-la-carte items may not be charged, and second meals will not be allowed.
3. When a charge has occurred and there is a negative balance on a student's account, a written notification shall be sent to parents/guardians on a weekly basis, and will be followed up on with phone calls. Communication to parents/guardians about meal debt will include the free and reduced-price meal application, the Hamden Food Resource Guide, and information on services offered at the Keefe Community Center.

Once 20 meals are charged, a referral will be made to a school social worker. The social worker will assess whether the student's family is experiencing hardships, barriers or other circumstances with which the social worker can assist. The social worker will encourage the parents/guardians to submit a free and reduced-price meal application and inquire about any assistance that might be needed to complete the application.

Once a student's unpaid meal charges equal or exceed the cost of 30 meals, the District is required to make a referral to the McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Education Liaison.

4. All credited meals must be repaid. The Connecticut State Department of Education requires that the household pays all delinquent student debts no later than June 30th to ensure that students' accounts are closed. These student meal accounts

must be at a zero balance for the next school year.

Delinquent Debt and Bad Debt

The District's efforts to recover money owed due to the charging of meals from households 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 will consider whether the benefits of potential collections outweigh the costs which would be incurred to achieve those collections.

Definitions

"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.

Nondiscrimination Statement: This explains what to do if you believe you have been treated unfairly.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442;
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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