

BUSINESS

Food Service - Charging Policy

The Coventry Board of Education (the “Board”) recognizes the importance of providing nutritious food to students in the Coventry Public Schools (the “District”).

The Board is a sponsor of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services’ Child Nutrition Programs, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the District shall adhere to the federal and state guidelines and regulations pertaining to these school Child Nutrition Programs. In accordance with federal law, the Board will make a public announcement and notify parents and guardians of the eligibility criteria for free and reduced price meals and provide information regarding how a household may make an application for these benefits. Such notice and application will generally be distributed at the beginning of each school year.

Free/Reduced Price Meals

After the successful completion and approval of an application, the Board will provide free or reduced price meals to eligible elementary and secondary students enrolled in the District’s 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 lunch and any related information will be considered strictly confidential and not to be shared outside of the District’s food services program or as required by law.

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

Charging Meals

The District uses an automated prepayment system for student meal accounts. Any student whose account has insufficient funds (i.e., is at the charging limit) and does not bring a meal from home may charge meals and will be informed of their right to purchase a meal, which excludes a la carte items, for any school breakfast, lunch or other feeding. In the event a student’s unpaid meal charges are equal to or more than the cost of thirty (30) meals the parents/guardians of such student will be referred to the District’s homeless education liaison.

When a student charges a meal, a written notification shall be sent home to parents/guardians. Communications with parents/guardians regarding collection of a student’s unpaid meal charges shall include information on local food pantries, an application for free or reduced price meals and the Department of Social Services’

supplemental nutrition assistance program, and a link to the District's website that lists any community services available to town residents. All charged meals must be repaid within 10 days.

The Board prohibits the public identification or shaming of a student for any unpaid meal charges, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Delaying or refusing to serve a meal to such student; or
- Designating a specific meal option for such student; or
- Otherwise taking any disciplinary action against such student.

Adults are not allowed to charge meals and shall pay for such meals at the time of service or through pre-paid accounts.

The Board may accept gifts, donations, or grants from any public or private sources for the purpose of paying off any unpaid charges for school meals.

Collection of 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 District will consider whether the benefits of potential collections outweigh the costs which would be incurred to achieve those collections.

For purposes of this policy, "delinquent debt" is when unpaid meal charges are not collected and are considered a loss. 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 of each school year or written off as an operating loss, which cannot be absorbed by the District, but must be restored using nonfederal funds.

The District will contact the parents/guardians of students who charge meals to their meal accounts in order for the District to collect the delinquent debt. The first such communication will be a written communication, by mail or e-mail, after no more than three meals have been charged. Subsequent written and verbal communications with parents/guardians concerning delinquent debt will be made by the building administrator or designee, as may be necessary and appropriate. All communications regarding unpaid meal charges shall be made directly and discreetly to parents/guardians. Written communications with parents/guardians regarding collection of a student's unpaid meal charges shall include an application for free or reduced price meals, information on local food pantries and the Connecticut Department of Social Services' supplemental nutrition assistance program, and a link to the District's or Town's website that lists any community services available to Town residents.

In the event a student's unpaid meal charges are equal to or more than the cost of thirty (30) meals, the parents/guardians of such student will be referred to the District's homeless education liaison.

The Board shall comply with applicable federal and state laws and other federal or state requirements concerning the collection of unpaid meal charges, including but not limited to requirements relating to delinquent debt and "bad debt," as defined by federal law, and record-keeping relating thereto. The Board may accept gifts, donations or grants from any public or private sources for the purpose of paying off any unpaid charges for school lunches, breakfasts or other such feeding.

Dissemination of Policy

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

This policy shall be included in student/parent handbooks, placed on the District's website, and published at the beginning of each school year at the time information is distributed regarding free and reduced price meals.

This policy shall be provided to all District 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 shall be informed of this policy.

The District shall maintain, to the extent required by law, documentation of the methods used to communicate this policy to households and District staff responsible for policy enforcement.

The District shall provide this policy to the Connecticut State Department of Education during Administrative Reviews.

The Superintendent or designee may, if necessary and appropriate, develop administrative regulations in furtherance of this policy.

Legal References Available Upon Request

Adopted: March 10, 2022

Revised: January 12, 2023