

Business/Non-Instructional Operations

## **FOOD SERVICE CHARGING POLICY**

**3542.43 (a)**

The Fairfield Public School District recognizes the important link between proper nutrition and academic success. The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent district procedure for charging meals when students do not have money to pay, preventing meal charges, and ensuring eligible children are certified for free and reduced-price school meals.

### **Charging Meals**

Because hunger is an impediment to learning, no child shall be denied a school meal because of an inability to pay. Children will be served a meal that meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrition standards for school meals.

A student needing to charge a meal will be informed of his/her right to purchase a meal, which may exclude a la carte items. The school district will allow students to charge meals up to a certain number of meals or dollar amount.

Hand stamps, stickers, or any other means of overt identification of children with unpaid meal debt in the cafeteria or the classroom are prohibited. Additionally, children with unpaid meal debt shall not be required to work off their debt, including, but not limited to, wiping down tables or cleaning the cafeteria. The Board directs schools to avoid the public identification or shaming of a student for any unpaid meal charges. Therefore, the student shall not be denied the right to purchasing a meal nor should a specific meal option be offered.

### **Preventing Meal Charges**

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

- Provide all households with school meal applications prior to the start of the school year and/or include instructions for completing online school meal applications;
- Provide school meal applications in the primary language of the parent or guardian and provide assistance with completing an application for any household that requests assistance;
- Promptly utilize data provided by the state or other school district officials to certify eligible children without an application; and
- 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.

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**3542.43 (b)**

**Preventing Meal Charges** (continued)

To ensure that households are aware of negative account balances and the potential to accrue meal debt, the school nutrition department will:

- Send out low balance notices prior to students needing to charge meals;
- 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; and
- Use automated email alerts to notify parents of negative balances.

Such notifications will include an application for free or reduced-price meals, the supplemental nutrition assistance program administered by the Department of Social Services, and a link to the District’s website that lists any available community services.

**Collecting Unpaid Meal Debt**

All communication regarding unpaid meal debt shall be directed at parents or guardians. Schools may send children home with a letter in an unmarked envelope. Such communication must include the information described above.

Prior to contacting households regarding unpaid meal debt, the school district shall ensure that the student is not participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, or other federal programs, which would confer categorical eligibility for free school meals, or is not homeless, migrant, or in foster care, and would allow them to be certified without an application.

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 or his/her designee shall develop regulations designed to effectively and respectfully address family responsibility for unpaid meals.

All meal accounts must be paid in full by the last day of the school year or the date designated by the individual schools, whichever date comes earlier.

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**3542.43 (c)**

**Collecting Unpaid Meal Debt** (continued)

For households that cannot afford to pay their school meal charges, the school district will work with them to establish a payment plan. Households that are subsequently certified for free or reduced-price school meals at a point later in the school year shall not immediately be required to repay school meal debt accrued in that school year

The Board will accept gifts, donations, or grants from any public or private sources for the purpose of paying off any unpaid meal charges of students.

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**3542.43 (d)**

- 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.
    - 10-215b Duties of State Board of Education re feeding programs. (as amended by PA 21-46)
  - State Board of Education Regulations
  - 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,” Nov. 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. (7 CFR 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”

Adopted: 10/11/2022