

Purposes and Facilities: Food Service

The goal of the District's food services program is to provide students with nutritious and healthy foods that enhance learning.

The Southington 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 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 is 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 or grade group.

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 nonprofit 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 prepaid accounts.

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

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

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Charging

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, for any school breakfast, lunch or other feeding.

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.

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 lunch to apply.

Elementary and Secondary Students

1. The District uses an automated prepayment system, which allows parents/guardians to view their child's meal account balance and purchases, receive low-balance notifications, as well as, make deposits, to their child's school meal account. Any student whose account has insufficient funds (i.e., is at the charging limit) and does not bring a meal from home may charge any combination of meals. Negative balance status can be avoided by making a payment in the form of cash, check, or by credit card to the automated prepayment website.
2. All other a-la-carte items shall not be charged. After thirty charges, the parents/guardians of such child will be referred to the District's homeless education liaison. When a charge is incurred, a written notification shall be sent home to parents. All credited meals must be repaid.

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Charging (continued)

3. No student shall be deprived of a reimbursable meal due to forgotten or lost meal money. The Principal or his/her designee is responsible for collecting money loaned to students. Students will be responsible for repaying all loaned money within an established timeframe. A note shall be given to the student to take home or mailed to the student's home to inform parents of the loan obligation. In situations in which a student is consistently without meal money, the Principal or his/her designee should encourage the parent/guardian to apply for free or reduced price meals.
4. All charges must be paid in 10 days. Parents will be notified and asked for prompt payment after 3 charges.
5. Communications with parents/guardians regarding collection of a child's unpaid meal charges shall include information on local food pantries, 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/city residents.

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Charging (continued)

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. 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 within the current 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.

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.

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

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Dissemination of Policy

This policy shall be disseminated via an electronic post on each school's web page.

This policy shall be available to all households at all times via 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.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-215 Lunches, breakfasts and other feeding programs for public school children and employees. (as amended by PA 21-46)

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

10-215b Duties of State Board of Education re feeding

programs. 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"

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