



721.4 534 NEGATIVE MEAL CHARGE POLICY

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students receive healthy and nutritious meals through the school district's nutrition program and that school district employees, families and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding meal charges. The policy of the school district is to provide meals to students in a respectful manner and to maintain the dignity of students by prohibiting lunch shaming or otherwise ostracizing the student. The policy seeks to allow students to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day and to minimize identification of students with insufficient funds to pay for ala carte items or second meals as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

- A. SoWashCo offers one reimbursable breakfast and lunch free of charge to all grade levels. The Nutrition Services Department strives to produce high-quality meals that meet both state and federal guidelines.
- B. Students may purchase ala carte items or second meals when funds have been deposited into their meal account with cash, check or online through the district's meal payment system.
- C. Households may apply for Education Benefits once the application period opens and any time during the active school year. If household size or income changes, families can apply or reapply for meal benefits.
- D. Families must submit a new education benefits application each year. Prior to the start of each school year, families will receive notice to complete the application. Information will direct families to a website to complete the Application for Education Benefits online or download and print a paper application. Applications are also available in new enrollment packets, each school's office and at the District Service Center in both English and Spanish. Applications in other languages are also available by request.

III. MEAL CHARGE PROCESS

- A. Students are required to go to the cafeteria and enter their PIN number so that their personal account can be accessed.



- B. Students are allowed to receive one reimbursable breakfast and one lunch daily. All other items are required to be charged to the student's account.
- C. Once a student's account is negative, they will only be provided a reimbursable meal and will not be able to add other menu items to their meal. Staff will ensure this process will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program.
- D. If a cashier inadvertently allows an ala carte purchase to go through and funds are not available, the account will go negative the family will be responsible for the debt.
- E. Letters will be mailed quarterly notifying families of any negative meal balances.

IV. UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- A. The school district will make reasonable efforts to collect unpaid charges classified as delinquent debt. Unpaid charges are designated as delinquent debt when payment is overdue, the debt is considered collectable, and efforts are being made to collect it.
- B. Collection options may include, but are not limited to, use of Collection Agencies, claims in the conciliation court, or any other method permitted by law.
- C. Other than Collection Agencies, the school district may not enlist the assistance of non-school district employees, such as volunteers, to engage in debt collection efforts.

V. COMMUNICATION OF POLICY

- A. This policy and any supporting information will be provided in writing to all households at or before the start of each school year. Students and families who transfer into the school district will also receive the meal charge policy at the time of enrollment.
- B. The school district will post the policy on the school district's website, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.



SOUTH WASHINGTON COUNTY SCHOOLS
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To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted 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; or
- (2) **fax:** (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) **email:** program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

POLICY CREATED: August 25, 2022

POLICY REVISED: August 17, 2023