

## **Business/Non-Instructional Operations**

### **Food Service**

#### **Charging Policy**

The goal of the food service program is to provide students with nutritious and healthy foods, through the District's food services program, that will enhance learning. The school nutrition program is an essential part of the education system and by providing good-tasting, nutritious meals in pleasant surroundings; we are helping to teach students the value of good nutrition.

The 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 will be 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.

Although not required by law, 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 non-profit 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 pre-paid 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.

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.

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#### **Charging Policy** (continued)

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.

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.

#### **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.

#### **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 with the 2017-2018 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.

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#### **Charging Policy** (continued)

#### **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 school or school district during the school year.

This policy shall be included in 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.

(cf. 3542 – Food Service)

(cf. 3542.31 – Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program)

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

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#### **Charging Policy**

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes (continued)

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”

Policy adopted: January 22, 2024

REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 14  
Bethlehem and Woodbury, Connecticut

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### **Food Service**

#### **Charging Policy**

##### **Purpose for Administrative Regulation**

School boards must adopt a policy pertaining to student lunch accounts. Every effort must be made to collect delinquent debt. If the uncollectible debt is a student lunch account, it cannot be an expense to the school food service account and must be covered by non-Federal funds. A board of education can decide if it wants to develop separate procedures for primary-aged children versus secondary-aged children.

The following prohibitions must be adhered to when developing a student lunch/meal account procedure. Schools are not allowed to deny meals to any child for disciplinary reasons. Schools cannot deny a meal to a reduced or paid child, if the child has money in hand for the day's meal, and schools cannot deny a meal to a student eligible for free meals even if money is owed. Whatever the procedure the school or food service establishes, the school must assure that the procedure does not discriminate against or single out any group of students.

##### **Procedures for Student Lunch/Meal Accounts**

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) requires school food authorities to establish written administrative guidelines and procedures for meal charges.

The District will adhere to the following meal charge procedures:

1. Students may pay at the time of service by cash or check. Students may pre pay electronically via credit card for meals by logging onto Myschoolbucks.com.
2. A student with a negative balance will not be able to charge or purchase "a la carte" items including a second main meal.

##### **Collection Process for Region 14 Schools:**

Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, an email of notification will be generated from the District's Point of Sale system and sent to families with students who have outstanding balances.

The notification will include information of the current meal prices, a link for the application for free and reduced priced meals, payment options and contact information for any questions.

When a child's unpaid meal charges equal or exceed the cost of thirty (30) meals, such child's parent/guardian shall be referred to the District's homeless education liaison.

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**Collection Process for Region 14 Schools: (continued)**

**Any Child Who Has an Outstanding Balance Greater Than \$50.00**

A letter will be sent home from the Director of Finance and Operations or his/her designee informing the parent/guardian of the outstanding balance including options for payment. Additionally, the link for the free and reduced application will be included in this letter.

The student will continue to be served a full reimbursable meal and the account will be charged accordingly.

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.