

The district adopts this policy to ensure that school food service professionals, school administrators, families and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding school meal charges. The purpose of this policy is to allow students to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day, minimize identification of students with insufficient funds to pay for school meals, and maintain the financial integrity of the nonprofit school food service program.

The district will meet the meal price guidelines for students and adults as required by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Programs. It is the policy of the district that all student meals be paid for in advance in order to efficiently and accurately account for all meals served in the food service program. The following guidelines are established for the purpose of maintaining efficient food service operations.

ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

When a student's school meal account funds are exhausted, an elementary student paying the full or reduced price for meals is limited to three (3) charged meals.

After three (3) meals have been charged, students will not be allowed to charge further meals until the negative account balance has been paid in full. However, such students will be allowed to purchase a meal if the student pays for the meal when it is received. Students who have charged the maximum amount and cannot pay out of pocket for a meal will be provided an alternate meal which meets the federal requirements for reimbursement. Alternate meals will be at the discretion of the food service supervisor. Alternate meals will be provided for breakfasts and/or lunches. The alternate meal will be provided at a cost of half the regular meal price. Students with a disability who require a modified alternate meal will be provided such modified alternate meal when necessary to accommodate the student's disability. Students who qualify for free meals will never be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a negative balance from previous purchases.

SECONDARY STUDENTS

Secondary students in the district are not allowed to charge meals. Students who have a negative account balance will be allowed to purchase a meal if the student pays for the meal when it is received. Alternate meals will be at the discretion of the food service supervisor. Students who cannot pay out of pocket for a meal will be provided an alternate meal which meets the federal requirements for reimbursement. Alternate meals will be provided for breakfasts and/or lunches. This meal will be provided at a cost of half the regular meal price. Students with a disability who require a modified alternate meal will be provided such modified alternate meal when necessary to accommodate the student's disability. Students who qualify for free meals will never be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a negative account balance from previous purchases.

Cashier stations at all schools will be placed before the serving area to avoid requiring a student to return a meal if they are found to have reached the maximum charge amount.

ACCOUNT BALANCES

The district will make reasonable efforts to notify families when meal account balances reach \$0, prior to going into a negative balance. After the first meal is charged or when the account is one dollar (\$1.00) negative, the parent/guardian will be notified of the negative account balance and the need to re-establish a positive account balance for the student's use. At least one (1) written warning will be provided to a student and his or her parents/guardians prior to denying meals for exceeding the district's charge limit. Families will be notified of \$0 and negative balances by automated calling system, and/or a letter sent home with the student, and/or by U.S. mail, and/or by email, and/or by a phone call.

Notices of \$0 or negative balances may include a copy or description of this policy and information regarding how to apply for free or reduced-price meals, including contact information for the [identify contact title, e.g. federal programs director], who can help them with the application process. Active efforts to encourage eligible households to apply for free or reduced-price meals may be used to prevent meal charges.

A parent/guardian may call the school cafeteria or the food service director to place a block on his/her child's account to prohibit the purchase of a la carte items. Account balances may be checked at any time by accessing the designated website with appropriate login information or by calling the school cafeteria. Parents/guardians may also sign up for low balance notices and/or automatic payments with the online payment vendor.

Account balances will rollover to the next school year. Students who are graduating at the end of the year will be given a refund of their balance. Funds can be transferred to a sibling's account with a written request from the parent/guardian. The district will attempt to contact families of students who withdraw from the district to return any funds remaining in the student's account. Households approved for reduced price meal benefits are entitled to a refund of any funds remaining in their accounts under federal law.

COLLECTION OF DELINQUENT ACCOUNTS

If payment of a negative balance is not received within ten (10) days of the maximum charge limit being attained, the debt will be turned over to the superintendent or designee for collection. Unpaid meal charges may be carried over at the end of the school year as delinquent debt and collection efforts may continue into the new school year. If the debt is not paid within thirty (30) days of mailing the final notice of the negative account balance, it shall be considered bad debt for purposes of federal law concerning unpaid meal charges. Such bad debt must be restored using non-federal funds, from sources such as the district's general fund, special funding from state or local governments, or other sources.

NOTICE

The district will provide a copy of this policy to all households at the start of each school year and to families and students that transfer into the district at the time of transfer. All district staff responsible for enforcing any aspect of this policy will also receive a copy and are expected to be familiar with the guidelines set forth herein. This policy may also be communicated to school social workers, school nurses, the homeless liaison, or other staff members who may assist students in need. The district may also make this policy available in student handbooks, the district’s website, or by other means as deemed appropriate.

RECORDS

In accordance with federal law, records of how and when this policy is communicated to households and staff will be retained. The district will also retain documentation of the handling of bad debt, including:

1. Evidence of efforts to collect unpaid meal charges in accordance with this policy;
2. Evidence the collection efforts fell within the timeframe and methods established by this policy;
3. Financial documentation showing when the unpaid meal charge(s) became an operating loss; and
4. Evidence any funds written off as bad debt were otherwise restored to the non-profit school food service account using non-federal resources.

CHARITABLE ASSISTANCE

The district may establish an unpaid meal charges fund to recover the cost of unpaid meal charges. Charitable groups, individuals, school fundraisers, and others may donate to this fund. Parents or guardians of students who pay the full amount for school meals and who have funds left over in their school meals account at the end of the year may be offered the option of donating these funds to the unpaid meal charges fund. If the district chooses to establish an unpaid meal charges fund, the superintendent or designee may establish procedures for the use of such funds.



LEGAL REFERENCE:

Idaho Code Sections

33-512 – Governance of Schools

33-603 – Payment of Fees or Returning of Property

42 U.S.C. §§1751 *et seq.* – National School Lunch Act

7 C.F.R. Part 210 – National School Lunch Program

SP 46-2016 – Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies (USDA)

SP 23-2017 – Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q & A (USDA)

ADOPTED: January 11, 2023

AMENDED: August 11, 2025

Note: This policy is required; however, the language is discretionary. All full-price policies for school meals are matters of local discretion. This includes decisions about whether or not to extend credit to children who forget their meal money or whether or not to provide an alternate meal to such children. Schools are encouraged to always provide meals to preprimary and younger primary students or to students with disabilities that may make them unable to take full responsibility for their meals.