

2026-2027 NUTRITION SERVICES

Breakfast/Lunch Program Information and Meal Purchasing Procedures

Welcome to the Columbia Public Schools' (CPS) Nutrition Services meal service! This document is meant to assist our families with understanding how the school district serves meals. Nutrition Services has a computerized cashier system at all schools. All students enrolled in CPS are automatically assigned access to a student debit account to purchase and to pay for lunch, breakfast, and/or a la carte items. Money may be deposited into a student's account so that it is available each time a student eats and allows the student to move through the lines quickly. Students may choose to pay cash daily to our cashiers; however, students are discouraged from bringing cash to school due to potential loss. Columbia Public Schools will not be responsible for any deposits or lost funds not given directly to the Nutrition Services Department whether cash or check. As a convenience, parents/guardians may view student purchases and deposit money online. Parents are welcome to eat with their children in the cafeteria (adult price is \$3.50 for breakfast and \$5.50 for lunch)

Parental/Guardian account access to child(ren) meal information:

- Parents/guardians may review and/or pay for student purchases online via the <https://www.myschoolbucks.com/> or by downloading the “MSB Parent, USA” app from your Apple Store or Google Play. Using this app also allows parents/guardians to receive notifications about low balances.
 - NOTE: MySchoolBucks will be disabled if a student is not actively enrolled in the current school year. Positive and negative balances in the account will remain.
 - Parents/guardians that wish to be considered for free or reduced-price meal benefits **must** complete a free and reduced-price meal application on the www.MySchoolApps.com, or obtain a copy online at tcpsk12.org/nutrition. Applying online provides families with quicker processing times. **Free and reduced-price meal applications are accepted all year long.**
 - If you're experiencing financial hardship (e.g., job loss, illness), please contact Nutrition Services at 573-214-3480 to discuss assistance options.
 - Nutrition Services hosts a community donation account to assist students and families in need. One hundred percent of proceeds go towards a child's meal.
 - To donate go to [Lunch for Learners](#)
- To receive meal benefits (like free or reduced-price meals), students must choose a complete meal and not a la carte items.
- A la carte items (such as snacks or individual drinks) are not part of a full meal and are an additional cost. Parents or guardians can pay for extra a la carte items by adding money to their child's meal account. For prices and details, please visit the Nutrition Services website.
- All schools use a computerized cashier system. Each student is automatically assigned a meal account. To access this account, all students enter their student ID on a keypad at the cash register for food purchases. This account rolls information from year to year and follows your child in the Columbia Public School district. Kindergarten students are encouraged to practice using their individual student identification number to move through the lunch lines efficiently.
- There are 3 ways to pay on or to review this account:
 - In the school cafeteria to school lunch personnel only

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- Online via <https://www.myschoolbucks.com/> (the computerized system also tracks student purchases). Families who would like to use this app on their cell phone device must download the “MSB, Parent USA” app from their Google Play or Apple Store.
- In the Nutrition Services office at 1818 W. Worley St., Columbia, MO 65203
- When using a credit card, processing fees apply as follows:
 - MySchoolBucks fee is a flat fee of \$3.95 per every \$120 transaction.
 - By phone or in person, the payment system is also called SchoolPay, and the fee is \$2.00 per every \$50 transaction.
 - These fees are not collected by the District. The fees are associated with the payment company the District uses to offer convenience for our families.

What Counts as a Meal Under Free and Reduced-Price Meal Benefits?

To qualify for free or reduced-price meal benefits, students must select a complete meal that meets federal nutrition guidelines. Otherwise, it will be charged at full or a la carte prices.

- **Meal Requirements:**

- Students must take at least 3 components for the meal to count.
- One of the selected components must be fruit or a vegetable.
- If a meal is missing a required component, students may be charged a la carte prices or may be asked to go back and choose the missing component.
- **Breakfast** consists of 4 items offered across 3 components: 2 grains/bread, milk, fruit. Students must have at least 3 different items on their tray to receive meal benefits.
- **Lunch** consists of 5 different components: meat/meat alternate, grains/bread, fruit, vegetable, and fluid milk. Students must take at least 3 different components.

Figures 1 and 2 below are educational images found in all cafeterias to assist students with offer vs. serve selections for breakfast and lunch.



Free, Reduced-Price and Full-Price Meals

Annually all households by regulation will receive a free and reduced-price application to the address or e-mail listed on file in our Student Information System (SIS). Applications for meal benefits must be submitted every year to maintain meal benefits from July 1 through June 30. Income guidelines change

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every July 1st. Eligibility begins as of the date parents place on the application or within 60 days of a federal claim if the date is beyond 2 months. Applications are accepted all year long.

In school year 2026-2027, all students without prior approval of free meal benefits, when selecting a meal without money in their account, will have the full-price meal charge added to their account. Households are responsible for all student charges incurred prior to free meal benefit approval.

All households who apply for benefits will be notified by the e-mail listed in the Student Information System whether approved or denied. Households that haven't received an e-mail of their results are encouraged to contact Nutrition Services at lunch@cpsk12.org or call 573-214-3480. If a student is missing from the meal benefit notification, contact Nutrition Services immediately to have that student added to the application to avoid unnecessary meal charges. Meal charges do not go retroactive before the date on an approved application. All accumulated charges are the responsibility of the parent/guardian of the student. Columbia Public Schools reserves the right to pursue payment of unpaid charges with a third-party collection agency. Please see the new *Student Charges and Delinquent Meal Accounts* section for details.

Parents are welcome to eat meals with their children.

Meal Prices are updated July 1st of every year, please visit the Nutrition Services' website for update cpsk12.org/nutrition

Student Charges and Delinquent Meal Accounts and Charge Procedures

A complete lunch must consist of at least 3 of the 5 components offered: Whole Grains, Meat/Protein Alternative, Fruit, Vegetable, and Milk. A complete breakfast consists of 3 components offered: Grain or Protein item (2 offered daily), fruit/vegetable, and milk. All students are required to take a fruit or vegetable serving at both lunch and breakfast or will be charged a la carte prices. A la carte purchases are strictly prohibited if a student does not have money in his or her account or if the account balance is negative, regardless of cash in hand. Milk or juice-only purchases are considered a la carte purchase. Courtesy automated phone calls will also go out to all households with **any** negative meal account balances weekly.

Students who go through the meal line to obtain a complete meal will not be denied a meal for any reason. There is no alternate meal for delinquent accounts. All students receive the same meal offer regardless of account balance.

Special Notes:

- Secondary students (grades 6-12) will be informed of their account balances upon request and/or if they inquire about why they are unable to obtain extra meal items due to account deficits.
- Seniors with a delinquent meal account will be denied their diploma for graduation.

Important Information: Students will only be allowed to charge a maximum of 5 lunches and breakfasts combined before an additional automated message is generated to all households with a deficit account of negative \$25.00. Accounts with any deficit are considered delinquent. Immediate payment in full is required to avoid further action.

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All delinquent accounts exceeding a negative \$50.00 will be turned over to a third-party debt recovery service and considered bad debt. Once delinquent debt is turned over to a debt recovery service, interest fees and court fees associated with lawsuits may be charged if bad debt is not resolved in a timely manner. Columbia Public Schools has chosen a debt recovery service that is sensitive to our families' needs and will set up a payment plan if needed.

Once a delinquent account is turned over to a 3rd party collection service, payments must be directed to the 3rd party service to avoid account confusion. Any payments made to Columbia Public Schools after being turned over to the 3rd party collection service will be added to the students' account for future purchases and **will not** be applied to outstanding bad debt without explicit instructions with payment to do so.

All communications sent home are sent using the student information on file with the district. Please keep all student contact information up to date to receive important information. Failure to receive these notifications does not negate parental/guardian responsibility for negative meal balances.

Meal Account Refunds:

All refunds must be requested. Refunds of \$10 or less are only issued in person in the Nutrition Services office at 1818 West Worley Street, Columbia. Amounts over \$10.00 must be requested and will be mailed to the address on file for the parent/guardian. Refunds may take up to 4 weeks to process. Families who plan to leave the district at year's end are encouraged to make plans for refunds that may include the address of their new residence or make an early request. Overseas payments will take significantly longer to receive. Refunds older than 3 years for unenrolled students will no longer be available for refund due to the limited capacity to maintain student financial information for inactive students.

School Lunch Refunds Before Going Back to Your Home Country

If you are leaving the United States and want a refund of your school meal balance prior to your departure, please contact the Nutrition Services Office at least 4 weeks before you leave. Processing time can take up to 4 weeks, so it is important to plan. To request a refund, contact Nutrition Services in one of 3 ways to provide a verified address for a refund:

- Email : lunch@cpsk12.org
- Phone: 573-214-3480
- Visit: 1818 W. Worley St., Columbia, MO

If you do not contact Nutrition Services in time, a check can be mailed to your home country address, but delivery may take much longer to arrive. Note: Check refunds will only be issued for balances over \$10, and checks will be mailed to the address provided. Refunds of less than \$10 can be provided in the Nutrition Services office in cash.

Meal Modifications or Food Allergies

If your child has a food allergy that requires a food substitution in the cafeteria, a physician's order is required that includes foods to be eliminated and a list of acceptable substitutions. The student's physician must complete and sign the [Medical Statement for Student Requiring Meal Modification](#) form found on the next page and on CPS Nutrition Services' website cpsk12.org/nutrition or call 573-214-3480 to have a copy mailed or faxed to a physician. Due to the large number of students, Nutrition Services cashiers will be unable to monitor for students' religious or lifestyle preferences that are not

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physician-ordered. However, updated menus and allergen information can be found on the Nutrition Services' website to assist families with meal selections daily.

All foods sold to students during the school day are under the scrutiny of USDA's National School Lunch Program Regulations which were created to promote high standards for all foods available to children. Columbia Public Schools strictly adheres to research-based nutrition regulations geared toward targeting nutrient deficits and excesses in the U.S. American diet.

School Food Share Baskets and Food Allergies

School Food Share Baskets provide a way for students to place uneaten, unopened food items served as part of the Federally subsidized meal program into a designated basket for other students to take free of charge. This initiative helps reduce food waste and supports students who may be experiencing food insecurity. Please note only items from the school meal program are allowed in the share basket. Food brought from home may not be placed in the basket. Children with food allergies are cautioned not to take food from the food basket/table due to possible unknown ingredients.

For more information regarding school meals, please contact the Nutrition Services office at (573) 214-3480, e-mail with questions, lunch@cpsk12.org or log on to the Nutrition Services' website: cpsk12.org/nutrition.