Business/Non-Instructional Operations

Food Service Charging

The goal of the food service program is to provide students with nutritious foods 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 and reduced price meals to elementary and secondary students enrolled in the District's schools. 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.

Due to 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 District offers 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. Meals can also be purchased with cash/check.

The District prohibits publicly identifying or shaming a student for any unpaid meal charges, including but not limited to the following:

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

Any student whose account has insufficient funds and does not bring a meal from home or does not have cash or a check to pay, will be given the same reimbursable meal(s) that other children are provided.

Parents of students with a negative balance will be contacted by the District to encourage prompt payment of outstanding fees. Negative balance status can be avoided by making a payment in the form of cash, check or by credit card.

All charged meals must be repaid. If a pattern of charging continues, attempts will be made to discuss the issue with the parents/guardians and encourage them to complete a free and reduced meal application in accordance with the regulations for this policy. The district will take the following action(s) to collect negative balances:

- An auto generated email is sent to any account on file when a student's account has a negative balance. This email contains information relating to using the online portal to put funds on your child's account.

- Additionally, the Food Service Director will do follow up calls to the parent/guardian, at the contact number indicated in the school district software system, notifying them either via a conversation or message, that their child was served a meal/s and that there were not enough funds in their account to cover the cost of the meal/milk and that it is expected that payment will be made the next day.

As time goes by without reimbursement or reimbursement was made but additional meals are consistently provided without funds, the follow steps will be taken:

- The email/contact steps will be taken again.

- The Food Service Director will provide this information to the principal/designee and ask for the family to be contacted in case there are extenuating circumstances the food service department may not be aware of.

- The school building principals/designee will contact the parent/guardian to discuss the situation, to determine if there is a need the family has that the district is not aware of, if appropriate offer direction/guidance to obtain support and arrange for debt repayment.

- Additionally, Per the State of Connecticut, Department of Education, Operational Memorandum No 11-22, "If a student's unpaid meal charge equals or exceeds the costs of 30 meals, the LEA must also refer the parent or guardian to the LEA's designated local McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Education Liaison".

The district shall comply with the applicable federal and state laws and other federal or state requirements concerning the collection of unpaid meal charges, including but not limited to requirements relating to unpaid meals, as defined by federal law, and record keeping relating thereto. The District may accept gifts, donations or grants from any public or private sources for the purpose of paying off any unpaid charges for school lunches, breakfasts or other such feeding programs. The District is required to have all unpaid meal balances paid in full by June 30 of each year, from monies other than the food service account.

The policy shall be included in student/parent handbooks, placed on the District's website, and published at the beginning of each school year at the time information is distributed regarding free and reduced price meals.

(cf. 3542.1 Food Service)

(cf. 3542.31 Free or Reduced Price Lunches)

Legal References: Connecticut General Statutes.

10-215 Lunches, breakfasts and other feeding programs for public shool children and employees.

10-215a Non-Public school and non-profit agency participation in feeding programs.

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

State Board of Education Regulations.

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.

State of Connecticut, Department of Education, 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.

Federal law:

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

7 C.F.R. Part 220 School Breakfast Program.

7 C.F.R. Part 245 Determining Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Meals and Free Milk in Schools.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Policy Memo SP 46-2016, "Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policy," July 8, 2016.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Policy Memo SP 47-2016, "Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments," July 8, 2016.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Policy Memo SP 57-2016, "Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A," Sept. 16, 2016.

Policy Adopted: October 1, 2025

Lyme/Old Lyme Board of Education