The Leona Schools

National School Lunch Program & School Breakfast Program

Unpaid Meal Charge Policy

Purpose

The Leona Schools participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE). The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent procedures for managing unpaid meal charges while ensuring all students have access to nutritious meals and are treated with dignity and respect.

Meal Service

Students approved for free, reduced-price, or paid meal benefits shall be offered one reimbursable breakfast and one reimbursable lunch regardless of the balance in their meal account.

No student shall be denied a reimbursable meal, provided an alternate meal, or otherwise identified because of an unpaid meal balance. Students with unpaid meal charges shall receive the same meal and level of service as all other students.

A meal may only be withheld if the school has received written instructions from the student's parent or legal guardian directing the school not to provide meals when funds are unavailable.

Charging Meals

When a student in the paid or reduced-price meal category does not have sufficient funds available at the time of service, the cost of one reimbursable breakfast and/or lunch will be charged to the student's meal account.

Only reimbursable breakfasts and lunches may be charged. À la carte items, adult meals, second meals, and other non-program food items must be paid for at the time of purchase and may not be charged.

Notification of Low and Negative Balances

The NSLP Coordinator shall monitor meal account balances on a regular basis through the district's meal accounting system.

Households will receive discreet notifications regarding low or negative balances using one or more of the following methods:

- Email
- Written notice
- Automated notification through the meal payment system
- Telephone call

As a general practice:

- When a student's negative balance reaches approximately **$10**, the household will receive a written or electronic reminder requesting payment.
- When the negative balance reaches approximately **$20**, the NSLP Coordinator will attempt direct telephone contact with the household.
- When the negative balance exceeds approximately **$40**, the School Leader or designee will contact the household to discuss payment options, determine whether the family may qualify for free or reduced-price meal benefits, provide information regarding available assistance programs, and establish a reasonable repayment plan when appropriate.

Communication with households regarding meal account balances shall always be conducted in a respectful and confidential manner that protects student privacy and prevents overt identification or stigmatization.

For students enrolled in grades 9 through 12, appropriate school personnel may discreetly communicate low balance information directly with the student in addition to notifying the parent or guardian.

Assistance to Families

The Leona Schools recognizes that financial circumstances may change during the school year.

School staff shall make reasonable efforts to assist households by:

- Encouraging families to apply or reapply for free and reduced-price meal benefits when appropriate.
- Reviewing Direct Certification eligibility when applicable.
- Assisting families with completion of meal benefit applications.
- Providing information regarding available community food assistance resources.
- Offering reasonable repayment arrangements when appropriate.

Collection of Unpaid Meal Charges

The district will make reasonable efforts to collect unpaid meal charges through courteous and confidential communications with households.

Collection efforts may include:

- Written notices
- Email reminders
- Telephone calls
- Repayment agreements
- Other reasonable collection practices consistent with district financial procedures

Collection activities shall never result in the overt identification, embarrassment, or stigmatization of a student.

Outstanding meal account balances may carry forward from one school year to the next while collection efforts continue in accordance with district financial procedures.

Student Meal Accounts

Families are encouraged to prepay meal accounts through **LINQ Connect**:

https://linqconnect.com

Payments may also be made at the school using cash or check.

Positive meal account balances remain the property of the household and will automatically carry forward from year to year while the student remains enrolled in the district.

If a student graduates or permanently withdraws from the district and has a remaining positive balance of more than $5.00, the household will be contacted regarding reimbursement or transfer of the remaining balance in accordance with district procedures.

Donation of Funds

The Leona Schools may accept voluntary monetary donations intended to assist students with unpaid meal charges.

Donated funds shall be maintained separately from federal Child Nutrition Program funds and administered in accordance with district procedures.

The district shall distribute donated funds in a fair, equitable, and nondiscriminatory manner. Distribution of donated funds shall not result in the overt identification of individual students or households and shall comply with all USDA and ADE requirements regarding confidentiality.

Student Confidentiality

Students with unpaid meal charges shall not be:

- Identified or singled out because of an unpaid balance.
- Provided a different meal.
- Required to perform work or chores in exchange for a meal.
- Required to wear identifying wristbands, stamps, or other markers.
- Publicly reminded of unpaid balances.
- Denied participation in school activities because of unpaid meal charges.

Meal account information is considered confidential and shall only be shared with school personnel who have a legitimate educational or administrative need to know.

Staff Training

This policy shall be provided annually to all employees responsible for implementation, including:

- NSLP Coordinators
- Food service personnel
- Cashiers
- School Leaders
- Office personnel responsible for communicating with households

Annual training shall include:

- USDA unpaid meal charge requirements
- Student confidentiality
- Proper point-of-service procedures
- Household communication expectations
- Collection procedures
- Civil Rights requirements

Distribution of Policy

This policy shall be:

- Published in the Student Handbook.
- Posted on the district website.
- Provided during student registration and enrollment.
- Provided to households enrolling during the school year.
- Available in both English and Spanish.
- Made available in alternative formats upon request as required by law.

Policy Administration and Review

The Director of School Nutrition is responsible for administering this policy and ensuring all school personnel responsible for implementation receive appropriate training and follow established procedures.

This policy shall be reviewed annually and revised as necessary to ensure continued compliance with USDA regulations, Arizona Department of Education guidance, and district procedures.

Compliance with Federal and State Requirements

This policy shall be implemented in accordance with all applicable federal laws, USDA regulations, USDA policy memoranda, Arizona Department of Education Child Nutrition Program guidance, and any future amendments thereto. If any provision of this policy conflicts with applicable federal or state requirements, the applicable federal or state requirement shall govern.

USDA Civil Rights Statement

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, audiotape, 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.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a complainant should complete Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, which can be obtained online at https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.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 may be submitted to USDA by:

Mail:
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-9410

Fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442

Email: program.intake@usda.gov

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