

SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM MEAL CHARGING

The District encourages all parents and guardians (hereinafter "parents") to provide a healthy breakfast and lunch for their student(s). Parents are welcome to send students to school with a "brown bag/lunch box" meal. The District provides the opportunity to purchase a meal from the Food Service Department. Each meal is modeled after the federal nutrition standards. Payment is expected no later than when the meal is served. Payment may be in cash, or check made payable to Washington Food Service to be applied to an established student lunch account.

The school lunch program is required by federal law to operate as a non-profit, which must end each fiscal year without a negative balance. Uncollected debt must be paid to the school lunch program from other funds. Therefore, parents of students required to pay the full or reduced price for meals must ensure that the Food Service program is paid for their student's meals. The District's policy is to quickly escalate efforts to bring student meal accounts into positive balance, to avoid circumstances where these accounts build significant debt.

Student Meal Accounts

Parents of students who will be purchasing meals are required to establish and maintain a positive balance in the student's meal account. Funds may be deposited into a student lunch account by cash or check. Cash or checks may be presented to the cashier in the cafeteria. The use of checks is encouraged, as it provides a record.

Balance Statements

The District will work proactively with parents to maintain a positive balance in their student's meal account. Notices of a negative balance will be communicated by phone call or written notice from the Food Service department. The District recognizes that unexpected financial hardships occur and will work with parents in this circumstance to limit the amount of accumulated debt. To do so, it is essential that parents respond to notices and cooperate with district staff efforts. Fairness and equal treatment requires that those able to pay, but who fall behind, must promptly bring their students meal account into a positive balance. The District's proactive approach is intended to help ensure students have healthy meals and that parents do not accumulate significant debt to the school meal program.

Free or Reduced Price Meals

The District participates in the federally supported program to provide free or reduced price meals to students from families whose economic circumstances make paying for meals difficult. Income guidelines for eligibility are based on family size and are updated each year by the USDA. The District will ensure parents are informed of the eligibility requirements and application procedures for free or reduced cost meals as well as the requirements of this policy.

Parents shall be provided with an application for free or reduced cost meals annually as well as posted on the school district website and upon enrollment of a transfer student during the school year. The communication explaining the availability of the free or reduced price meals shall include all the elements required by federal regulation. Each notice shall also identify an individual, with contact information, who is available to answer questions or assist the parents with applying for free or reduced price meals.

As required by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and USDA guidance, parents with Limited English Proficiency ("LEP") will be provided with information on this policy and the free and reduced price meal program in a language the parents can understand. The District will utilize USDA and community resources to fulfill this requirement. This policy and links to application materials for the free or reduced price meal program will be posted on the school website and made available to parents at each school.

The District will proactively enroll students found to be categorically eligible into the free or reduced price meal program. The District will seek to enroll eligible students in the free or reduced price meal program upon learning from any source of the student's potential eligibility. When eligibility is established, the District will apply the earliest effective date permitted by federal and state law.

Students Without Cash in Hand or A Positive Account Balance

Regardless of whether a student has money to pay for a meal or has a negative balance in the student meal account, a student requesting a meal shall be provided with a meal from among the choices available to all students. The only exception will be where the student's parents have provided the District with specific written or on-line direction that the student not be provided with a school lunch program meal, the student has a meal sent from home, or otherwise has access to an appropriate meal. Under no circumstances will a student's selected meal be thrown away because of the status of the student's meal account.

It is the parents' responsibility to provide their student with a meal from home or to pay for school prepared meals. Therefore, the District's policy is to direct communications to parents about student meal debt. When parents choose to provide meals sent from home, it is the parents' responsibility to explain to their student the necessity of the student not using the school meal program.

Initial efforts to contact parents will be by phone, however if those efforts are unsuccessful, letters to parents will be sent home.

Should the student's meal account balance fall below zero, a negative balance notification requesting immediate payment shall be sent to parents, no less than once each week.

Staff Enforcement of Policy/Training

A copy of this policy and refresher training shall be provided annually to all food service and school staff responsible for serving student meals or enforcing this policy. New staff with these responsibilities shall be provided with a written copy of the policy and training on the policy during their initial training or orientation. In accordance with federal requirements, a record shall be maintained documenting that new staff receive the policy and training. The record must also document that all applicable staff receive a copy of the policy and refresher training annually.

Alternative Meals

If a student's meal account has a negative balance of \$20.00 or more, the student will be allowed to charge only an alternative meal. In accordance with state law, the alternative meal will be one of the meal choices generally available to all students, but which has the lowest cost to the lunch program to produce. The purpose of limiting students with negative balance meal accounts to

the alternative meal is to mitigate the losses to the District from providing uncompensated meals, while ensuring that the student has access to a healthy meal.

Legal References

15 U.S.C. § 1692-1695 federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA)

42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(6), Use or disclosure of information

Civil Rights Act of 1964 & 7 C.F.R. Part 15, Subpart A & B

2 C.F.R. §200.426

7 C.F.R §210.09

7 C.F.R §210.10

7 C.F.R §210.15

7 C.F.R. §245.5

USDA SP 46-2016 - No later than July 1, 2017, all SFA's operating the Federal school meal program are required to have a written meal charge policy.

USDA Guidance SP37-2016: Meaningful Access for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) in the School Meal Programs

RSA 189:11-a

RSA 358-C , New Hampshire's Unfair, Deceptive or Unreasonable Collection Practices Act; NH Dept. of Education Technical Advisory - Food and Nutrition Programs

Policy Adoption & Revision History:

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