

Meal Applications and Eligibility for School Meals

The District will provide free and reduced-price breakfasts and lunches to students who qualify in accordance with the programs. The District will annually distribute the Letter to Households and Free and Reduced-Price Meal Applications to all student households at the beginning of each school year. If a parent or guardian of a student needs assistance with application materials in a language other than English, the District will offer appropriate assistance to that parent or guardian. The District will protect the identity of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals in accordance with USDA guidelines for confidentiality and disclosure.

If the District has obtained available information from other sources that the student is likely eligible for free or reduced-price meals, but the parent or guardian has not submitted an application to determine the student's eligibility, the District will complete and submit the application for the student in accordance with the authority granted under 7 C.F.R. Sec. 245.6 (d). The completed application must set forth the District's basis for determining the student's eligibility. A District family determined eligible under this process will be notified that the family's children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. This determination must be made family by family, and the District will not make eligibility determinations or certifications by categories or groups of children.

At least monthly, the District will directly certify students for free school meals if the students qualify because of enrollment in assistance programs, including but not limited to the supplemental nutrition assistance program, the temporary assistance for needy families, and Medicaid.

The District and its school staff will work to improve systems for identifying homeless students, students in out-of-home care, runaway students, and migrant students to ensure that each student has proper access to free school meals and that applicable accountability and reporting requirements are satisfied.

Families may apply for free/reduced-price meal benefits anytime during the school year. Meal applications are distributed to all families in the district prior to the student's first day of classes. In addition, applications are available at the Nutrition Services Office located at 701 Stevens Drive. Applications can be requested by calling 967-6114. If household income or size change, families can apply for meal benefits anytime during the school year.

Meal Patterns and Menu Planning

The District will follow the USDA meal patterns for the National School Lunch Program, School Breakfast Program, and Smart Snacks in School standards for all food and beverages sold to students on school campus during the school day.

Meal Charge Policy

In order to allow students to receive nutritious meals, prevent over-identification of students with insufficient funds to pay for school means, and maintain the financial integrity of the nonprofit school nutrition program, the District will establish a written meal charge process for students eligible for reduced price meals and students that are not eligible for meals. The meal charge

policy will be communicated to households each year so that school district employees, families and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding meal charges.

Unpaid Meal Charges

If a student has not paid for five or more previous meals, the school will:

- (1) Determine whether the student is categorically eligible for free meals;
- (2) If no application has been submitted for the student to determine his or her eligibility for free or reduced-price meals, make no fewer than two attempts to contact the student's parent or guardian to have him or her submit an application; and
- (3) Have a principal, assistant principal, or school counselor contact the parent or guardian for the purpose of:
 - (a) Offering assistance with completing an application to determine the student's eligibility for free or reduced-price meals;
 - (b) Determining whether there are any household issues that may prevent the student from having sufficient funds for school meals; and
 - (c) Offering any other appropriate assistance.

No school or school district personnel or school volunteer may:

- (1) Take any action that would publicly identify a student who cannot pay for a school meal or for meals previously served to the student, including but not limited to requiring the student to wear a wristband, hand stamp, or other identifying marker, or by serving the student an alternative meal;
- (2) Require a student who cannot pay for a school meal or for meals previously served to the student to perform chores or other actions in exchange for a meal or for the reduction or elimination of a school meal debt, unless all students perform similar chores or work;
- (3) Require a student to dispose of an already-served meal because of the student's inability to pay for the meal or because of money owed for meals previously served to the student;
- (4) Allow any disciplinary action that is taken against a student to result in the denial or delay of a nutritionally adequate meal to the student; or
- (5) Require a parent or guardian to pay fees or costs in excess of the actual amounts owed for meals previously served to the student.

Communications for a school or school district about amounts owed for meals previously served to a student under the age of fifteen may only be directed to the student's parent or guardian. The District may send a student home with a notification that is addressed to the student's parent or guardian.

A parent or guardian will be notified of a negative balance of a student's meal account no later than ten days after the student's school meal account has reached a negative balance. Within thirty (30) days of sending this notification, the District will exhaust all options to directly certify the student for free or reduced-price meals. Within these thirty days, while the District is attempting to certify the student for free or reduced-price meals, the student may not be denied access to a school meal unless the District determines that the student is ineligible for free or reduced-price meals.

If the District is unable to directly certify the student for free or reduced-price meals, the school district will provide the parent or guardian with a paper copy of, or an electronic link to, an application for free or reduced-price meals with the negative-balance notification described above and encourage the parent or guardian to submit the application.

Students who qualify for free meals will not be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a negative balance from previous purchases. Students with outstanding meal charge debt will be allowed to purchase a meal if the student pays for the meal when it is received.

The District will make reasonable, discrete efforts to notify families when meal account balances are negative through use of calling the student's home, sending electronic mail messages to the student's parents or guardians, sending notes home with the student or sending a letter by US mail. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches \$3.00 or reflects a total of two lunch meals.

The District will make reasonable, discrete efforts to collect delinquent (overdue) unpaid meal charges, which is an allowable use of National School Food Service Account (NSFSA) funds, and will coordinate communications with families to resolve the charges.

All debt accrued prior to the free and reduced status is the responsibility of the parent to repay.

Students who have money to pay for a reduced-price or full price meal or ala carte items at the time of service will be provided a meal. If the student intended to use the money for that day's meal, the District will not use the money to repay a negative balance or other unpaid meal charge debt.

Parents can sign up to monitor student accounts at www.mymealtime.com.

Communication of Policy

Annually the written meal charge policy and accompanying regulation will be communicated to every household and student in the district in at least one of the following ways:

1. Posting on the District's website,
2. Including information about the policy in the student information packet,
3. Included in registration materials, and
4. Sending out Meal Benefits Application to all students' parents.

The meal charge policy and accompanying regulation will be communicated annually to all building staff prior to the first day of school.

Annually the Nutrition Services staff will receive training on meal charge policy and record of training will be maintained as part of the professional development portfolio.

The District will track the various methods of communicating the policy and accompanying regulation to households and training of staff responsible for policy enforcement. Documentation of the communication and training plan will be maintained for the Federal Program Administrative Review.

Graduation or Leaving the District

When a student graduates or otherwise leaves the District, the District must attempt to return remaining student account funds. But at the same time, the District will encourage families that are not eligible for free or reduced meals to donate their remaining funds to cover unpaid meal charges that were uncollectable.

If a graduating senior has a negative balance, the student may be denied the opportunity to walk at graduation until the debt has been paid.

Households approved for reduced price meals must receive a refund. The federal food program requires children eligible for reduced price meals pay a reduced price for meals they receive. If the District retains the unused funds it would result in the per meal price exceeding the proscribed amounts.

End of the Year Accounting

At the end of the school year, the District's Director of Nutrition Services and the Executive Director of Financial Services will evaluate all delinquent debt for conversion to bad debt. Each account will be handled on a case-by-case basis. In order for the delinquent debt to be converted to bad debt, there must be ample evidence by the Nutrition Services Department to demonstrate the variety of ways the matter was communicated to the parent, what efforts were made to collect the debt and any extenuating circumstances. Bad debt will be restored to the Nutrition Services budget from the general fund.

Once unrecovered or delinquent debt becomes bad debt, records related to those charges must be maintained in accordance with federal records retention requirements. (See 7 CFR, Section 210.9(b)(17) and 210.15(b)). The following records must be maintained to document the appropriate establishment and handling of bad debt:

- a. Evidence of efforts to collect unpaid meal charges
- b. Financial documentation showing when the unpaid meal charge(s) became an operating loss.
- c. Evidence any funds written off as bad debt were restored to the nonprofit school food service account NSFSA using nonfederal funding sources.

Households with questions or needing assistance may contact the school office where their student attends or the Nutrition services Department at 967-6114 or at 701 Stevens Drive.