

	Students/Families	SF25-0601
	School Meal Charge and Delinquent Account Policy	ADOPTED DATE: 6/17/2025 REVISED DATE:

Purpose

This policy ensures all students have consistent access to nutritious meals during the school day, regardless of their ability to pay at the time of service. It also outlines procedures for meal charges, account management, and handling both delinquent and positive balances.

Goals

- **Ensure Access to Nutritious Meals**
 Guarantee that all students receive a standard meal daily, regardless of their ability to pay at the time of service.
- **Promote Financial Responsibility and Transparency**
 Encourage families to maintain positive meal account balances and provide tools for monitoring and prepayment.
- **Support Families Facing Financial Hardship**
 Offer assistance, such as free or reduced-price meal applications and flexible repayment options, to families struggling to pay.
- **Maintain Program Sustainability**
 Prevent significant unpaid meal debt from impacting the school’s food service operations by setting clear procedures for managing delinquent accounts.
- **Foster Communication and Engagement**
 Ensure families are regularly informed about account status, policy details, and available supports through timely notifications and annual policy reviews.
- **Balance Compassion with Accountability**
 Avoid meal denial or stigma for students, while also holding families accountable with appropriate, graduated consequences and final collection measures if necessary.

Meal Payment Expectations

Parents and guardians are responsible for maintaining a positive balance in their child’s meal account.

- Prepayment is strongly encouraged.

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- Families can monitor account activity and make payments through the school's designated online payment system.
- Low balance alerts will be sent when an account nears depletion, typically below \$5.00.
- Families are encouraged to apply for free or reduced-price meals at any point during the school year. Applications are confidential.

Charging Meals

- No student will be denied a standard meal due to insufficient funds.
- Meals may be charged to a student's account, resulting in a negative balance.
- A la carte items (such as extra milk or snacks) will not be available for charge if the account has a negative balance.
- Families will be contacted promptly when a charge is made and encouraged to replenish the account.
- If balances remain unresolved beyond a set threshold, alternative meals (nutritionally adequate but basic in nature) may be served in place of standard menu items.

Positive Meal Account Balances

Maintaining a positive meal account balance is encouraged and appreciated. The school handles positive balances in the following ways:

- When the youngest family member is promoted or the family leaves the school, the family will be sent a notification of the positive lunch balance amount via email.
- The family will be given the option to:
 - Donate the positive balance back to the School to offset negative account balances; or
 - Request a refund check to zero out the family account.
- Donation selections must be submitted to the School in writing.

Delinquent Meal Accounts

The school recognizes financial hardships may occur and will work with families to resolve unpaid balances.

- Families will be contacted by email, phone call, and certified mail as needed when accounts become delinquent.
- Assistance will be offered in applying for free or reduced-price meals.
- An individualized letter will be sent by certified mail to families when negative balances exceed \$30 and remain unresolved after phone and email contact.
- If a balance exceeds \$30 and remains unpaid for more than 30 days from initial contact attempts:
 - The account may be referred to school administration for further follow-up.
 - Payment plans will be offered to support repayment.

Collection Process

If meal charges remain unpaid despite multiple outreach efforts:

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- The school may refer the account to a collection agency or pursue reimbursement through legal means, as approved by school policy.
- Before any referral occurs, the school will:
 - Initiate multiple email and phone contacts
 - Send a certified letter
 - Offer a payment plan and/or financial assistance
- A final due date and payment deadline will be set and communicated in the certified letter. For example: “Payment of the outstanding balance must be received within 15 business days of the date of this letter.”

Annual Review and Communication

This policy will be reviewed annually by school administration and food service staff. It will be included in student handbooks and available on the school’s website. Families will be reminded of the policy at the beginning of each school year.