

Food Service Meal Charges

It is the District's intent to ensure all students have access to healthy and nutritious food regardless of income levels. The District acknowledges that at times there may be financial barriers which prevent families from being able to pay for meals in a timely manner. As a result, the District has established the following framework to outline its procedures for management of food service meal charges.

Obtaining Financial Assistance

Families in financial need will be provided an application to determine eligibility for the free and reduced meal program. Applications are available by contacting the student's school building, on the District's website (www.ridgefieldsd.org), or through Skyward Family Access.

Families can request to use building lunch buddy program funds to assist in paying for reimbursable lunches/breakfasts, subject to funding availability. Due to limited funding, the District will limit the use of these funds for each student to 5 meals per year.

Families can also contact the Ridgefield School District Family Resource Center to request other financial assistance, or receive additional services.

Lunch Charges

Students will be allowed to charge food service costs to their student account up to \$12.00 for reimbursable breakfast and lunch meals only. The District does not permit students to charge any amounts for a la carte items (snacks, beverages, etc). Parents wishing to not allow charged meals can request so by contacting the District's Food Services Director, or cafeteria lead at the respective school building.

Employees/Contracted Staff are not permitted under any circumstances to charge meals or other items on account.

Emergency Lunch

Once a student reaches the \$12.00 charge maximum, the student will receive an emergency lunch at no cost by the cafeteria. The cafeteria will make efforts to protect the identity of students receiving emergency lunches by providing the lunches in a discrete manner. The cafeteria will notify the school guidance counselor or principal when a student receives emergency lunches in an effort to make outreach with the families and align them with additional services. The principal or designated staff will ensure the family is contacted within a reasonable time upon receiving the notification from the cafeteria.

The District will continue to provide emergency lunch to the student until (1) the student reaches 10 consecutive emergency lunches, or (2) the student has been qualified to receive free lunches as a result of a new family application, or (3) the family has been able to resolve the negative balance.

Communication

The District will provide written notification to all parents at the beginning of each school year of these procedures through the annual notification to all parents. In addition, the District will send weekly notifications through Skyward to all families via email when their balances become negative, or for outstanding fines and fees owed. The District will also send an automated call out to families on a weekly basis informing them of negative balances.

Alternatively, families can opt in to receive low balance alert notifications through their family access account. This low balance alert sends an email to the main family contact when the student balance falls below \$3.00. Families also have the ability to pay their food service charges online through the same family access portal.

Collections Process

Returned payments will be removed from the available food service balances for affected students. Families with more than \$25.00 in total outstanding fines and fees will be subject to the District's collections process. The district will send written notices at 30 days, 60 days and 90 days past due. The final notice will include a communication that the charges will be sent to the District's collections agency (Columbia Collectors) if payment arrangements are not made prior to 120 days past due.

Families can contact the individual school buildings or the Business Services Department to make payment arrangements for outstanding student fees, or Food Services Department for outstanding food service charges. When setting up payment plans, the District will consider the families available resources, and the amount of the outstanding debt to determine the payment levels and time period for which payments are to be due.

Remaining Food Service Balance

Upon withdrawal from the district, amounts remaining on account for students over \$5.00 will be automatically refunded to the family by the District Accounting Department. Prior to refunding any credit balances owed, the Accounting Department will check to ensure no other household family member has any negative balances within food service. The Accounting department will also check to ensure no outstanding student fees still owed by the student. If fees still owing, the food service refund will be applied to outstanding fines and fees, and any remaining balance will be refunded to the primary guardian on record.

For any amounts remaining under \$5.00, the district will remit funds directly to the Department of Revenue Unclaimed Property Division after 3 years, unless a parent specifically requests to receive a refund.

All families leaving the district will have an option to donate residual food service balances to a building lunch buddy fund. This fund will be administered by the Food Services Director and Building Administrator (or approved designee) at each location.

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