

## BOARD POLICY

STUDENTS: 5154A

SUBJECT: CHARGING SCHOOL MEALS

The Board of Education recognizes that on occasion students may forget to bring meal money to school. To ensure that students do not go hungry, the Board will allow students who may forget meal money to “charge” the cost of meals to be paid back at a later date subject to the terms in this policy.

To comply with state guidelines and maintain a system for accounting for charged meals, regarding both full and reduced – price meals, the Board shall adhere to the following:

1. Allow only regular reimbursable meals to be charged, excluding extras, a la carte items, side dishes, additional meals, and snacks (“competitive foods”); and
2. Serve a balanced/healthy, reimbursable meal (hot or cold) of the student’s choice along with fruit and a container of milk. (A la carte snack items may not be charged.)
3. Use a computer-generated point-of-sale system, which identifies and records all meals as well as collects repayments.
4. Charge the meal to the students account by using his/her student identification number.
5. The credit is expected to be repaid within five (5) business days. A letter and/or email will be generated from the school after five (5) meal charges notifying the parent or guardian of the existence of a negative balance and detailing the responsibility for payment and possible repayment plan opportunities. The school will print a copy of any negative balance and send a copy to the parent or guardian on a monthly basis using the District computer-generated program. Parents/guardians must repay all unpaid charges remaining at the end of the year or before their child leaves the District, whichever occurs first.

This policy applies to all paying students whether they are paying full-price or reduced-price. Families may apply for free and reduced meals at any time during the school year per District Policy 5145.

Charged meals must be counted and claimed for reimbursement on the day that the student charged (received) the meal, not the day the charge is paid back. When charges are paid, these monies are not to be considered “a la carte” transactions, as a section of the daily cash report or deposit summary reads “charges paid.”

Students shall not be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a negative balance from other cafeteria purchase, unless the parent/guardian has provided written permission to the school to withhold a meal. No student with unpaid charges will be prohibited from purchasing food if they have money that day.

If the Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Operations, or his designee suspects that a student may be abusing this policy, written notice will be provided to the parent/guardian.

Students who cannot pay for a meal or who have unpaid meal debt shall not be publicly identified or stigmatized (including wristbands or hand stamps), required to do chores or work to pay for meals, or have meals thrown away after they have been served. District staff shall not discuss a student's unpaid meal debt in front of other students. The District shall not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid school meal fees. However, the District may discreetly notify students of their account balances, and why certain items (e.g., a la carte, etc.) could not be provided with charged meals.

#### Student Account Balance Notification/Parent Outreach

The District shall discreetly notify parents/guardians of students with negative balances of a least five (5) meals, determine if the student is directly certified to be eligible for free meals, and make at least two (2) additional attempts to reach the parent/guardian to assist them in the application process for free and/or reduced price meals, and determine if there are other issues within the household causing the insufficient funds and offer appropriate assistance. Families with a student who continually have no lunch from home or money to purchase a meal will be referred to the school Social Worker. The school Social Worker will contact the parent/guardian and will suggest they apply for the Government sponsored "Free and Reduced Lunch" program. Approval in the program will assure that the cost would be borne by the Government program, not the District, and the child receives a balanced lunch. If a parent/guardian regularly fails to provide meal money and does not qualify for free or reduced price meals, the District may take other actions as appropriate, including notifying the local department of social services if neglect is suspected.

The school District shall notify all parents/guardians in writing on an annual basis at the start of the school year and to families transferring during the year, outlining the requirements of this policy and provide a copy of a free, printed meal application. The policy shall also be published in appropriate school and District publications and posted on the District website. All staff involved in implementing and enforcing this policy shall also be notified of these requirements and their responsibilities. The District's enrollment process shall include the application process for free and reduced price meals. If the District becomes aware that a student is so eligible, it shall file an application for the student. Staff responsible for assisting foster, homeless and migrant students shall coordinate with the food services staff to ensure such students receive free school meals.

## Unpaid Meal Charges and Debt Collection

Unpaid meal charges are a financial burden to the District and taxpayers and can negatively affect the school program. Unpaid meal charges shall be considered “delinquent” as per the District’s accounting practices. The District shall attempt to recover unpaid meal charges before the end of the school year, but may continue efforts into the next school year. The District shall notify parents/guardians of unpaid meal charges at regular intervals, and may engage in collection activities by District staff, which do not involve debt collectors as defined in federal law (15 USC §1692a) and may not charge fees or interest or file a lawsuit against students, parents or guardians. The District shall offer repayment plans, and may take other actions that do not result in harm or shame to the child, until unpaid charges are paid.

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via Infinite Campus Parent Portal or with a check payable to the school lunch fund. Further details are available on the District website.

## Remaining Account Balances

Remaining funds may be carried over to the next school year. When students leave the District or graduate, the District will attempt to contact the parent/guardian to return remaining funds. Parents/guardians may request that funds be transferred to other students (e.g., siblings, unpaid accounts). All transfer requests must be in writing. Unclaimed funds must be requested within one school year. Unclaimed funds remaining after one school year shall be absorbed by the school meal account.

## Staff

Staff members are allowed to purchase food from the District’s food services. However, all purchases must be on a cash basis and/or by means of Infinite Campus Teacher Portal. Staff members will not be allowed to charge meals to be repaid later.

Building Principals, working with the Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Operations, or his designee shall ensure that all District and food service staff with responsibilities under this policy will be trained on the provisions of this policy and the requirements of Education Law section 908.

Ref: 42 USC §1779 (Child Nutrition Act of 1966)  
42 USC §§1758 (f) (1); 1766(a) (National School Lunch Act)  
Education Law §908  
2 CFR §200.426 (accounting for debt in federal programs)  
7 CFR §§210.9; 210.12; 210.19; 220.13; 245.5 (account in federal school meal programs)  
Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (Public Law 111-296), §143  
15 USC §1692a (debt collector defined)  
USDA Report to Congress, Review of Local Policies on Meal Charges and Provision of Alternate