

Existing policy with modification based on P.A. 21-46.

Business/Non-Instructional Operations

Food Service

Charging Policy

The school lunch program is an extension of the Board of Education's educational programs. It is the Board's vision to have a partnership among students, staff, school family and community in offering access to and providing nutritious meals which are attractively presented at a reasonable price.

The Board of Education has an agreement with the Connecticut State Department of Education to participate in the school-based Child Nutrition Program. The Board accepts full responsibility for adhering to federal and state guidelines and regulations pertaining thereto. Program meals are planned to meet nutrient standards for children as specified by the United States Department of Agriculture in accordance with their age or grade group. All applications for free and reduced price lunch and any related information will be considered strictly confidential and not to be shared outside of the District's food services program.

Although not required by law, but due to its participation in the Child Nutrition Program, the Board approves the establishment of a system to permit students to charge a meal in certain situations.

First, the Board recognizes that funds from the non-profit School Food Service account, according to federal regulations, cannot be used to cover the cost of charged meals that have not been paid.

Moreover, federal funds are intended to subsidize the meals of children, and these funds may not be used to subsidize meals for teachers, staff or visitors. Therefore, adults are not permitted to charge meals and shall pay for such meals at the time of service or through prepaid accounts.

~~Charging is not encouraged by the Board, but on those occasions that a student does not have lunch money, s/he will be permitted to charge a standard Type A meal. Once a student has reached her/his charging limit, s/he will be offered an alternate meal.~~

~~An alternate meal is any meal that differs from the day's advertised, reimbursable Type A meal. The district will determine the alternate meal to be offered. Examples of alternate meals include, but are not limited to, the following:~~

- ~~• a fruit and/or vegetables and milk, or~~
- ~~• a tuna salad sandwich and milk, or~~
- ~~• a cheese sandwich and milk.~~

~~The Board prohibits the public identification or shaming of a child/student for any unpaid charges, including, but not limited to, the following:~~

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Food Service

Charging Policy (continued)

- Delaying or refusing to serve a meal to such student,
- Designating a specific meal option for such student or otherwise taking any disciplinary action against such student.

A student needing to charge a meal will be informed of his/her right to purchase a meal, which may exclude a la carte items, for any school breakfast, lunch or other feeding.

~~The cost for providing such alternate meals cannot be incurred by the School Food Service, and the charge for such alternate meals will be the same amount as the standard Type-A or reimbursable meal.~~ All charges must be paid within ten (10) business days following notification of the initial charge.

In order to sustain the District's food services program, the District cannot permit the excessive charging of student meals. Therefore, any charging of meals must be consistent with this policy and any accompanying regulations. The Superintendent or his/her designee shall develop regulations designed to effectively and respectfully address family responsibility for unpaid meals.

Any parent/guardian who anticipates a problem with paying for meals is encouraged to contact the Food Services Manager/Director and/or the applicable school Principal for assistance. The Board encourages all families who may have a child eligible for free or reduced price lunch to apply.

In summary, the Board's policy regarding meal charging is as follows:

1. Students may not charge more than ~~three (3)~~ thirty (30) Type-A reimbursable meals.
2. The School Food Service will inform students verbally when they have a low account balance, or when they have begun charging.
3. A la carte menu items cannot be charged.
4. Parents of elementary school students who charge will be notified by a letter given to the student by her/his classroom teacher or by telephone or email that their child has received charged meals. Middle and High School students' parents will receive a notification letter through email, or they will be contacted via telephone.
- ~~5. After the third charged meal, the School Food Service will provide an alternate meal. Parents will be notified that an alternate meal has been provided.~~
- ~~6. Alternate meals will be provided until all charged amounts, including full pricing for alternate meals, are paid.~~
- ~~7. The Board reserves the option to discontinue alternate meals should payment not be forthcoming within ten (10) school days' time.~~
5. In the event of hardship situations, parents/guardians may contact the Board's business office to discuss application for free or reduced price meals.

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Charging Policy (continued)

Elementary Students

Communications with parents/guardians regarding collection of a child's unpaid meal charges shall include information on local food pantries, application for free or reduced price meals and the Department of Social Services' supplemental nutrition assistance program and a link to the District's website that lists any community services available to town/city residents.

The Board will accept gifts, donations, or grants from any public or private sources for the purpose of paying off any unpaid charges for school meals.

Delinquent Debt and Bad Debt

The District's efforts to recover from households money owed due to the charging of meals must not have a negative impact on the children involved and shall focus primarily on the adults in the household responsible for providing funds for meal purchases. The school food authority is encouraged to consider whether the benefits of potential collections outweigh the costs which would be incurred to achieve those collections.

Money owed because of unpaid meal charges shall be considered "delinquent debt," as defined, as long as it is considered collectable and reasonable efforts are being made to collect it. Such debt must be paid by June 30, effective with the 2017-2018 school year.

After reasonable attempts are made to collect the delinquent debt, and it is determined that further collection efforts are useless or too costly, the debt must be reclassified as "bad debt." Such debt shall be written off as an operating loss not to be absorbed by the nonprofit school food service account but must be restored using non-federal funds.

This policy shall be included in student/parent handbooks, placed on the Board's website and the website of each school, and it shall be published at the beginning of each school year at the time information is distributed regarding free and reduced price meals.

This policy shall be provided to all school staff and/or school food authority staff responsible for its enforcement. In addition, school social workers, nurses, the homeless liaison, and other staff members assisting children in need or who may be contacted by families with unpaid meal charges also should be informed of this policy.

The District's school food authority shall maintain, as required, documentation of the methods used to communicate this policy to households and school or school food authority-level staff responsible for policy enforcement.

[September 2011 implementation]

Business/Non-Instructional Operations

Food Service

Charging Policy (continued)

(cf. 3542 – Food Service)

(cf. 3542.31 – Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-215 Lunches, breakfasts and other feeding programs for public school children and employees. (as amended by PA 21-46)

10-215a Nonpublic school and nonprofit agency participation in feeding programs.

10-215b Duties of State Board of Education re feeding programs.

State Board of Education Regulations

State of Connecticut, Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education Operational Memorandum No. 4-17, “Guidance on Unpaid Meal Charges and Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments,” Nov. 2, 2016.

State Board of Education Regulations (continued)

Operational Memorandum #19-10, State of Connecticut, Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education.

“Unallowable Charges to No-profit School Food Service Accounts and the Serving of Meals to No-paying Full and Reduced Price Students.

National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program; Competitive Foods. (7 CFR Parts 210 and 220, Federal Register, Vol 45 No. 20, Tuesday, January 29, 1980, pp 6758-6772.

USDA Guidance:

- SP 46-2016, “Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies”
- SP 47-2016, “Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payment”
- SP 57-2016 “Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q and A”
- SP 58-2016 “2016 Edition: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation’s Schools”

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NEW FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

New Fairfield, Connecticut