

Business/Non-Instructional Operations

Food Service

Collection of Unpaid Meal Charges

The New Fairfield Board of Education (the “Board”) recognizes the importance of providing nutritious food to students in New Fairfield Public Schools (the “District”).

The District is a sponsor of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services’ Child Nutrition Programs, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Programs (SBP), and the District adheres to the federal and state guidelines and regulations pertain to these school Child Nutrition Programs. In accordance with federal law, the District will make a public announcement and notify parents and guardians of the eligibility criteria for free and reduced-price meals and provide information regarding how a household may make an application for these benefits. Such notice and application will generally be distributed at the beginning of each school year.

Charging Meals

The District uses an automated prepayment system for student meal accounts in addition to cash sales. Students whose accounts have insufficient funds, and who do not bring a meal or other funds to school to pay for meals, may charge meals to their meal accounts. Students will be informed of their right to purchase a meal, which excludes a la carte items, for any school breakfast, lunch or other meal offered by the District, even if the student’s account has insufficient funds.

The District prohibits publicly identifying or shaming a student for any unpaid meal charges, including, but not limited to, the following:

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

Staff members and adults in the building are prohibited from charging adult meals and a la carte foods and beverages.

Collection of Unpaid Meal Charges

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 District shall consider whether the benefits of potential collections outweigh the costs that would be incurred to achieve those collections.

For the purposes of this policy, “delinquent debt” means unpaid meal charges.

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The District will contact the parents/guardians of students who charge meals to their meal accounts in order for the District to collect the delinquent debt. The first such communication will be a written communication, by e-mail, after the balance reaches \$5.00. Subsequent written and verbal communications with parents/guardians concerning delinquent debt will be made by the building administrator or designee, as may be necessary and appropriate. All communications regarding unpaid meal charges shall be made directly and discreetly to parents/guardians. Written communications with parents/guardians regarding collection of a student's unpaid meal charges shall include an application for free and reduced price meals, information on local food pantries and the Connecticut Department of Social Services' supplemental nutrition assistance program, and a link to the District's or Town's website that lists any community services available to Town residents.

In the event a student's unpaid meal charges are equal to or more than the cost of thirty (30) meals, the parents/guardians of such student will be referred to the District's homeless education liaison.

The first day (1st) day a meal is charged:

- An auto generated email is sent weekly to any account on file when a student's account has a negative balance. This email contains information relating to using the online portal to put funds on your child's account, applying for free-reduced price meals, accessing local food pantries, and community services in case this information is helpful.
- Additionally, the Kitchen Lead/designee will do follow up calls to the parent/guardian, at the contact number indicated in the school district software system, notifying them either via a conversation or message, that their child was served a meal/s and that there were not enough funds in their account to cover the cost of the meal/milk and that it is expected that payment will be made the next day.

If payment is not made or payment was made but additional meals are consistently provided without funds, the steps above will repeat, additionally the following steps will be taken:

- The Kitchen Lead/designee will provide this information to the principal/designee and ask for the family to be contacted in case there are extenuating circumstances the food service department may not be aware of.
- The school building principals/designee will contact the parent/guardian to discuss the situation, to determine if there is a need the family has that the district is not aware of, if appropriate offer direction/guidance to obtain support and arrange for debt repayment.
- Additionally, Per the State of Connecticut, Department of Education, Operational Memorandum No 11-22, "If a student's unpaid meal charge equals or exceeds the costs of 30 meals, the LEA must also refer the parent or guardian to the LEA's designated local McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Education Liaison."

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The district shall comply with the applicable federal and state laws and other federal or state requirements concerning the collection of unpaid meal charges, including but not limited to requirements relating to unpaid meals, as defined by federal law, and record keeping relating thereto. The District may accept gifts, donations or grants from any public or private sources for the purpose of paying off any unpaid charges for school lunches, breakfasts or other such feeding programs. The District is required to have all unpaid meal balances paid in full by June 30 of each year, from monies other than the food service account.

Dissemination of Procedures

This procedure shall be provided in writing to all student households at the start of each school year and to households transferring to the District during the school year. This procedure will be provided to all District 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 shall be informed by this procedure.

The District shall maintain, to the extent required by law, documentation of the methods used to communicate this procedure to student households and District staff responsible for procedure enforcement.

The District shall provide this procedure to the Connecticut State Department of Education during Administrative Reviews.

(cf. 3542 – Food Service)

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

Legal References:

State Law:

Connecticut General Statutes

§ 10-215 Lunches, breakfasts and other feeding programs for public school children and employees.

State of Connecticut, Department of Education, School Health, Nutrition and Family Services Operational Memorandum No. 11-22, “Connecticut Statutory Requirements for Unpaid Meal Charges in Public Schools,” June 15, 2022.

State of Connecticut, Department of Education, 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.

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Federal Law:

7 C.F.R. Part 210 National School Lunch Program.

7 C.F.R. Part 220 School Breakfast Program.

7 C.F.R. Part 245 Determining Eligibility for Free and Reduced-Price Meals and Free Milk in Schools.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Policy Memo SP 46-2016, "Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policy," July 8, 2016.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Policy Memo SP 47-2016, "Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments," July 8, 2016.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Policy Memo SP 57-2016, "Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A," Sept. 16, 2016.

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NEW FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
New Fairfield, Connecticut