



VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Food & Nutrition Services

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Meal Charge Policy

Policy 3542.2 Business & Non-Instructional Operations

Business/Non-Instructional Operations

Food Service

Charging Policy
Revised 3-28-22

The goal of the food service program is to provide students with nutritious and healthy foods, through the District's food services program, that will enhance learning. The school nutrition program is an essential part of the education system and by providing good-tasting, nutritious meals in pleasant surroundings; we are helping to teach students the value of good nutrition. The Board of Education (Board) has an agreement with the Connecticut State Department of Education to participate in one or more school Child Nutrition Programs and accepts full responsibility for adhering to the federal and state guidelines and regulations pertaining to these school Child Nutrition Programs. The Board also accepts full responsibility for providing free or reduced-price meals to eligible elementary and secondary students enrolled in the District's schools. Applicants for such meals are responsible to pay for meals until the application for the free or reduced-price meals is completed and approved. 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 without prior permission. Meals are planned to meet the specified nutrient standards outlined by the United States Department of Agriculture for children based on their age or grade group.

Although not required by law, because of the District's participation in the Child Nutrition Programs, the Board approves the establishment of a system to allow a student to charge a meal.

The Board realizes 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 may not be used to subsidize meals for adults (teachers, staff and visitors). Adults are not allowed to charge meals and shall pay for such meals at the time of service or through pre-paid accounts.

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

- 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.

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 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 submit an application.

Elementary and Secondary Students

Students shall be allowed to charge up to thirty (30) meals. The student will be given the same reimbursable meal that other children are provided. Parents/Guardians of students who charge shall be notified by phone or email, after their child has charged the cost of 5 meals. If a pattern of charging continues, attempts will be made to discuss the issue with the parents/guardians and encourage them to complete a free and reduced meal application. Communications with parents/guardians regarding collection of a child's unpaid meal charges shall include information on local food pantries, applications 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. When a child's unpaid meal charges equal or exceed the cost of thirty (30) meals, such child's parent/guardian shall be referred to the District's homeless education liaison.

For households that cannot afford to pay their school meal charges, the school district will work with them to establish a payment plan. Households that are subsequently certified for free or reduced-price school meals at a point later in the school year shall not immediately be required to repay school meal debt accrued in that school year. The school district will submit retroactive claims for any meals charged to the household from the date of application to the date of certification, to the extent allowed by USDA guidance.

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

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

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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