

Business and Non-Instructional Operations

Food Service

Charging Policy

I. Purpose and Scope

The goal of the District's food service program is to provide all students with access to nutritious and healthy foods that enhance learning and promote lifelong wellness. The Board of Education (Board) participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE).

While the Board strongly encourages prepayment, it recognizes that an occasional emergency or financial hardship may result in a student's account falling into a negative balance. This policy ensures a consistent, respectful, and legally compliant procedure for handling unpaid meal charges. The Board authorizes the Superintendent to establish administrative regulations for meal charges, ensuring equal access to reimbursable meals across all grade levels while establishing grade-appropriate boundaries for non-reimbursable à la carte purchases.

II. Provision of Meals

In accordance with Connecticut General Statutes §10-215 (as amended by Public Act 21-46) and federal law, the District strictly enforces the following protections across all schools, regardless of grade level:

- In accordance with C.G.S §10-215(b), any student has the right to purchase a standard reimbursable meal (excluding à la carte items), and no cap shall be placed on the total number of reimbursable meals a student may charge. No student shall be deprived of a standard reimbursable school meal (breakfast or lunch) due to a forgotten meal payment, an insufficient account balance, or accrued meal debt.
- Board employees are strictly prohibited from publicly identifying, stigmatizing, or shaming a student with unpaid meal debt. Prohibited actions include, but are not limited to:
 - o Delaying, omitting, or refusing to serve a reimbursable meal to a student.
 - o Forcing a student to accept a non-standard meal or a meal different from what is offered to all other students because of debt. Students with a negative balance shall receive the same reimbursable meal choices available to all other children.
 - o Applying hand stamps, stickers, tokens, or sending home marked/unsealed communications via the student.
 - o Requiring a student to perform chores, work off debt, or clean the cafeteria.
 - o Federal funds may not be used to subsidize adult meals. Adults (teachers, staff, and visitors) are not permitted to charge meals and must pay at the time of service or maintain a prepaid account.

III. Preventing Meal Charges and Certifying Eligibility

The School Food Authority (Director of Food Services) shall actively assist families in securing free or reduced-price meal benefits to prevent the accumulation of negative balances:

- The SFA shall distribute application materials prior to the start of the school year in households' primary languages. All application data remains strictly confidential.

- The District shall systematically cross-reference state data to automatically certify students participating in SNAP, TANF, or who are otherwise categorically eligible (foster, homeless, or migrant status).
- If school officials are aware of a household's financial eligibility but cannot secure a completed application, the appropriate school official may complete an application on behalf of the child, as permitted by USDA guidance.
- The SFA shall utilize automated electronic notifications to alert parents/guardians before an account balance reaches zero.
- The SFA shall notify and alert parents/guardians with an established cash account.

IV. Delinquent Debt vs. Bad Debt

The Board recognizes its fiduciary duty to protect the financial integrity of the non-profit school food service account:

- Unpaid meal charges are considered "delinquent debt" if they are deemed collectible and active, and respectful efforts are being made to recover them from the adults in the household.
- Direct communications with parents/guardians regarding unpaid meal charges shall include applications for free and reduced-price meals. SNAP enrollment information, contact details for local food pantries, and a link to municipal services.
- When a parent or guardian's unpaid meal debt reaches or exceeds the cost of thirty (30) meals, the district shall automatically refer the household to the district's designated McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Liaison.
- If collection efforts fail and debt is determined uncollectable by the end of the fiscal year (June 30), it must be classified as "bad debt." Per federal regulations, bad debt cannot be absorbed or written off by the non-profit school food service account. It must be restored using non-federal funds (e.g., the District's General Fund, municipal appropriations, or approved private donations/grants).
- The Board authorizes the acceptance of private gifts, grants, or donations earmarked specifically for liquidating outstanding student meal debt.

V. Implementation

The Superintendent or his/her designee shall establish administrative regulations to implement this policy, outlining grade-appropriate communications, and collection practices focused solely on parents or guardians.

(cf. 3542 – Food Service)

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

C.G.S. § 10-215(a) Nonpublic school and nonprofit agency participation in feeding programs.

C.G.S. § 10-215(b) Duties of State Board of Education regarding feeding programs.
McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison Referral Threshold

C.G.S. § 10-215 (b)(3) Mandatory Parent Communication Inclusions

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”

CSDE Operational Memorandum No. 11-22 (Connecticut Statutory Requirements for Unpaid Meal Charges in Public Schools), which establishes the CSDE review checklist for school nutrition program audits.

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”

Policy adopted:

WOODBIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT
Woodbridge, Connecticut

Business/Non-Instructional Operations

Food Service

Charging Policy Regulations

1. Prepayment and Account Management

- Online Payment Portal: Parents/guardians are encouraged to manage meal accounts through the District's secure automated payment system, My Payments Plus. This platform enables families to monitor purchases, set up low-balance electronic notifications, and submit payments via credit card, ACH, or debit card.
- Direct Payments: Cash or checks made payable to Woodbridge School Lunch Fund may also be submitted directly to the main office of any school or to the cafeteria point-of-sale terminal.

2. Meal Charging and A La Carte Restrictions (Grades K–12)

In accordance with Connecticut General Statutes § [10-215](#), no student shall be denied a reimbursable meal (one breakfast and one lunch per school day) due to a lack of funds or an unpaid meal balance. The District strictly prohibits setting any cumulative dollar or numerical limit on a student's ability to charge reimbursable meals.

- All K–12 students may charge standard reimbursable meals (one breakfast and one lunch per school day). Cafeteria staff will never withhold, remove, or discard a meal tray or item at the point of sale, nor substitute a non-standard meal option due to an unpaid balance. Students with a negative account balance shall receive the same reimbursable meal choices available to all other students.
- Students are strictly prohibited from charging non-reimbursable a la carte items (extra entrees, snacks, cookies, juice, or non-reimbursable beverages) if their account balance is negative (\$0.00 or less).
- Any cash presented by a student at the point of sale must first be applied toward purchasing food for that day. Staff will never confiscate cash to pay down past debt if doing so leaves the student without a meal. Change may be applied toward past debt only upon explicit instruction from a parent/guardian.

3. Parent/Guardian Communications

All communication regarding unpaid meal debt must be directed exclusively to parents, guardians, or adult household members. School staff and food service personnel are strictly prohibited from discussing account balances or charges directly with students, or taking any action that publicly identifies or stigmatizes a student.

- Physical notices sent home with elementary students must be delivered using the "Backpack Mail Protocol" (a sealed, unmarked envelope placed directly inside the student's take-home folder).
- In accordance with C.G.S. § [10-215\(b\)\(3\)](#), every written or electronic notice sent to a household regarding a negative balance must include:
 - Information on local food pantries.
 - Direct application instructions for the Free or Reduced-Price Meal Program.
 - Direct contact details for the Connecticut Department of Social Services' Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
 - A link to the [Town's Human Services webpage](#).

4. Tiered Collection Timeline and Intervention Protocols

The District executes grade-appropriate intervention schedules to address meal debt with empathy, sensitivity, and strict privacy controls:

- **Confidential Electronic Outreach:** Low and negative balance notices are sent directly to parents/guardians electronically. Notices will never be delivered verbally to students at the point of sale.
- **Low Balance Alert (\$5.00):** Parents with an established My Payments Plus account will receive an automated email/text notification routed to the parent/guardian.
- **First Negative Balance:** Food Service sends an automated electronic notice to the parent/guardian attached with a digital Free/Reduced-Price Meal Application.
- **Accumulation of 5 Meal Charges:** Food Service staff generates a written statement sent directly to the household via postal mail, email or a sealed envelope in the student's folder. Staff will never hand a paper slip directly to a child in line.
- **Accumulation of 20 Meal Charges:** The Principal or designee conducts a supportive outreach call or wellness check with the family to assist with meal applications and identify financial hardships.

Universal Statutory Escalation

- **Accumulation of 30 Meal Charges:** Once a student's account reaches an accumulation of thirty (30) charged meals, the District formally refers the family to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Liaison to evaluate for housing displacement, foster placement, or categorical instability.

5. Year-End Settlements and Legal Safeguards

- **General Fund Restitution:** Unpaid meal charges constitute delinquent debt while active collection efforts continue. On June 30 of each fiscal year, any remaining uncollectible meal debt must be reclassified as "bad debt" and restored to the School Food Authority account using non-federal District general funds.
- **Formal Collection Remedies:** For excessive, non-responsive negative balances exceeding 120.00, the Superintendent or designee reserves the right to pursue formal collection remedies directed exclusively toward parents/guardians, provided collection costs do not exceed the debt owed.
- **Abuse/Neglect Escalation:** If a student repeatedly lacks meal funds and the household consistently ignores outreach, the Principal will evaluate whether the pattern indicates suspected educational or physical neglect requiring a mandatory report to the Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Regulation approved:

Business/Non-Instructional Operations

Food Service

Food Charging Policy

In accordance with federal law and USDA guidelines, the Woodbridge School District adopts the following policy to ensure District employees, families, and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding meal charges. The policy seeks to allow students to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day, prevent the overt identification of students with insufficient funds to pay for school meals, and maintain the financial integrity of the District's nonprofit school nutrition program.

Payment of Meals

Meals can be paid for by cash, by check, or by establishing an account through Meal Payments Plus online at <https://www.mypaymentsplus.com/welcome>. Students who qualify for free meals shall never be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a negative balance from previous purchases. Students with outstanding meal charge debt shall be allowed to purchase a meal if the student pays for the meal when it is received.

Negative Account Balances

The Woodbridge Board of Education prohibits the public identification or shaming of a student for any unpaid meal charges, including, but not limited to, 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.

The District will make reasonable efforts to notify families when meal account balances are low. Additionally, the District will make reasonable efforts to collect annual unpaid meal charges classified as delinquent debt. The District will coordinate communications with families to resolve the matter of unpaid charges. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches \$20.00. Families will be notified by written notice sent home with the student. Such written notice shall include, but not be limited, to: (a) information regarding local food pantries; (b) applications for the District's program for free or reduced-price meals and for the supplemental nutrition assistance program administered by the Department of Social Services; and (c) a link to the District's website that lists any community services available to residents of the Town of Woodbridge.

In the event that unpaid meal charges reach the cost of thirty (30) meals, the parents/guardians of such child shall be referred to the district's homeless education liaison. Negative balances of more than \$15.00 not paid prior to end of the school year may be turned over to the Superintendent or his/her designee for collection. Money owed because of unpaid meal charges shall be considered "delinquent debt," as defined by federal and State statutes, as long as it is considered collectable and reasonable efforts are made to collect it. Such debt must be paid by June 30 of each school year. After the debt is reclassified as "bad debt," such debt shall be written off as an operating loss not to be absorbed by the non-profit school food service account, but that must be restored using non-federal funds.

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.

Communication of the Policy

The policy and supporting information regarding meal charges shall be provided in writing to:

- All households at or before the start of each school year;
- Students and families who transfer into the District, at time of transfer; and

- ~~All staff responsible for enforcing any aspect of the policy.~~

~~Records of how and when the policy and supporting information was communicated to households and staff will be retained.~~

~~The Superintendent may develop an administrative process to implement this policy.~~

~~(cf. 3542 Food Services)~~

~~(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.~~

~~[10-215a](#) Nonpublic school and nonprofit agency participation in feeding programs.~~

~~[10-215b](#) Duties of State Board of Education re feeding programs.~~

~~P.A. 21-46, "An Act Concerning Social Equity and the Health, Safety and Education of Children"~~

~~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
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Policy adopted: December 20, 2021

**WOODBIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Woodbridge, Connecticut**