Meal Charge Policy & Procedures

Introduction

The goal of IDEA Public School's (IDEA) Child Nutrition Program (CNP) is to provide students with healthy meals each day. The purpose of this policy is for IDEA CNP to be compliant with federal, state & local policy, and to provide oversight and accountability for the collection of outstanding student meal balances.

Parents may provide their own child with breakfast, lunch, or snacks. To ensure the health and safety of students with food allergies, intolerances and special diets, students may not share food from home with other students. For more information, see the Wellness Policy at the IDEA Website referenced in the contact information below.

As per the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), disabled students and students with free eligibilities cannot be denied a reimbursable meal even if the student has accrued a negative balance.

Free and Reduced Meal Applications

Families are asked to complete a Free and Reduced Meal (FARM) application before the beginning of the academic year. Only one application for all students in the household is needed. The FARM application is provided to CNP by the state agency and is used to determine if students and/or families qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch for the academic year. FARM applications for the 2021-2022 school year can be submitted beginning July 1, 2021. The FARM application is available to families online at www.schoolcafe.com. The application is also available for physical pick up at the school. Parents/guardians can pick up the application, complete it, and submit it to the Cafeteria Manager at their respective school for processing. Families also have the option of printing the FARM application from IDEA CNP website at https://ideapublicschools.org/parents/cnp. Parents/guardians can print the application, complete it, and submit it to the Cafeteria Manager at their respective school. Families are encouraged to complete and submit the application before the first day of school.

Eligibility Changes

Households may update their meal application throughout the school year by contacting the cafeteria manager or reapplying online if the household has experienced any changes. For example, if the household size increases, changes in income occur, or the household begins to receive SNAP, TANF or other benefits (such as unemployment benefits), the household may update their meal application. Negative balances resulting from eligibility changes for free eligible students are not collected from households by IDEA CNP. IDEA must subsidize the nonprofit school food service account for those meals annually.

Transfer Students & 30-Day Carryover

New students transferring to a non-CEP IDEA school from a Special Provision or CEP district will receive a carryover eligibility of free for the first 30 operating days of enrollment or until a new eligibility determination is made with the submission of a FARM application, whichever comes first.

New Students

New students enrolling in a non-CEP IDEA school who did not transfer from a CEP district, will have a meal status of paid on the first day of school until a FARM application is submitted by the household and processed by IDEA CNP. Cafeteria management will do everything possible to collect a meal application.

Menu Pricing & Negative Balances

Menu pricing for CEP schools and schools that do not qualify for CEP can be found at https://ideapublicschools.org/parents/cnp. Schools that qualify for CEP for the academic school year offer free breakfast and lunch to all students. For students that attend a non-CEP school for the academic school year, lunch meal charges will be based on eligibility determined using information provided by the household on the FARM

application. A lunch meal costs $2.85 for full-priced students (household did not qualify for free or reduced-priced benefits).

When a student's account has a 1-meal debt or more outstanding, a negative balance notification letter and a meal application is sent home with the student by cafeteria management. When a student's account has a 1-meal debt or more outstanding, School Messengers (automated emails and pre-recorded phone calls) are also sent to households to remind parents/guardians to provide payment.

When a student's prepaid account reaches -$42.75 (a 15-meal debt) or more, the Assistant Principal of Operations (APO) contacts the household. School officials investigate the situation more closely and take further action as needed. Cafeteria management provides a list of the students that fit these criteria on a weekly basis. APOs can adjust the dollar threshold amount at which they contact the household.

When a student's prepaid account reaches -$57.00 (a 20-meal debt) or more, the household is notified for a meeting with school leaders and cafeteria management. School leaders can adjust the dollar threshold amount at which they are involved with household meeting.

Excess Balance Donation

At the end of the academic school year, families have the option to donate any leftover funds remaining in their student's school lunch account. The donations are made to an account for students in need, and the donations in this account are made available to children who do not have the funds needed to pay for their lunch during the school day.

Families that do not make a donation will have their full account balance carried over into the next school year or have the option to request a refund. Families that donate a portion of their remaining balance (e.g., "up to $5.00") will also have any amount above this portion carried over or refunded.

To donate leftover funds, families can donate by completing the "Statement of Consent for Donation" form found at https://ideapublicschools.org/parents/cnp. The form is also available at the school cafeteria.

Courtesy Meals

IDEA CNP may provide a courtesy meal for students who receive full-priced eligibility but do not have money to pay. A courtesy meal consists of a cheese sandwich, milk, fruit, and vegetable. Courtesy meals are offered at no charge to students with negative meal balances. School leaders decide if courtesy meals are implemented at their school. They will also decide the negative dollar amount threshold at which courtesy meals will be implemented.

CNP must document and communicate to the state agency which IDEA schools have courtesy meals as part of the policy statement of collection procedures. If school leaders decide to implement courtesy meals, please contact cafeteria management to complete the "Courtesy Meal Implementation Form". To be compliant with IDEA local policy, the courtesy meal implementation form must be signed and submitted in order to be able to communicate to the state agency that schools will implement courtesy meals.

For schools who decide to implement courtesy meals, all household notifications listed in section titled *Menu Pricing & Negative Balances* must be sent out before implementation. A courtesy meal notification must be included in each of the household notifications previously listed.

Every effort is made to contact the household before the school implements a courtesy meal. The household must

be notified via a telephone call from cafeteria management **and** a courtesy meal letter must be sent home with the student 1 week before implementing out the courtesy meal.

The cycle of courtesy meals is as follows:
A student may not be on a courtesy meal longer than 10 consecutive school days. Once this time frame is met the student will no longer receive a courtesy meal for the next 30 days, regardless of receipt of payment. If after 10 consecutive school days, payment has not been received from the household, school officials will investigate the situation more closely and take further action as needed. To the extent of contacting local authorities as recommended by USDA, as they consider necessary. Once the 30-day grace period is met if the balance has not been paid the school official may implement a courtesy meal again.

For any student who has a medical statement for a meal accommodation, the courtesy meal served to that student must still meet the required accommodations.

Preventing Overt Identification

Cafeteria management must identify students receiving a courtesy meal before they go through the serving line. Once the student is identified, cafeteria staff must **discreetly** notify the student that they are receiving a courtesy meal for the day.

If a student is not identified before they proceed through the serving line, it is not allowed to take the student's plate away at the point of sale. Cafeteria management allows the student to proceed with their plate and must charge the meal taken to the student's account.

Courtesy meals must be recorded by CNP in the point of sale system (POS) by selecting the Courtesy Meal button. In order to reduce the possibility of overt identification, courtesy meals are made available to all students as a menu choice in the serving line and for sale as an A la Carte item during lunch service. Courtesy meals sold A la Carte are recorded by CNP in the POS by selecting the A la Carte Courtesy Meal button.

The chart below provides preferred alternatives to actions that single out students with unpaid meal charges or low account balances.

Prohibited Actions	Required Actions
Announcing or publicizing the names of students with unpaid meal charges.	Communicating privately with individual families about their student's outstanding balance.
Requiring students with unpaid meal charges to use a different serving line to pick up an alternate meal.	Serving students with unpaid meal charges the regular reimbursable meal or a courtesy meal in the same serving line.
Using hand stamps, stickers, or other physical markers to identify students with meal charge debt.	Communicating payment reminders directly to adults in the family over the phone, email, or letter.
Sending clearly marked notices home with students who have an outstanding balance.	Sending discrete reminders in a plain, white envelope, or sending reminders with other communication materials to all families.
Enlisting volunteers, especially parents or guardians of other students, to request payment from a family with unpaid meal charges.	Allowing only appropriate officials trained on USDA's confidentiality requirements who have a need to access a child's account balance or eligibility information to request payment from families with unpaid meal charges.

Suggesting or requiring student with unpaid meal charges to work for a meal to pay back their debt.	Working with families to develop a payment plan to pay back meal charge debt.
Throwing a child's meal in the trash or denying a meal if they are unable to pay.	Serving student who are unable to pay the regular reimbursable meal or a courtesy meal.

Non-Reimbursable Meals

CNP encourages all students to take reimbursable meals. Whether at a CEP or non-CEP school, if a student takes a non-reimbursable or an incomplete meal, a fee will be charged regardless of student eligibility. Balances incurred for non-reimbursable or incomplete meals are collected by CNP.

A La Carte Charges

A la Carte transactions may not be charged on a student account with insufficient funds to cover the purchase. This applies to students at CEP and non-CEP schools.

No a la Carte items may be charged on a student account unless written communication has been received from the household by completing the "A La Carte on Account Charges" form. Balances incurred for A la Carte purchases will be collected by CNP. A la Carte purchases include snacks and menu items. The "A La Carte on Account Charges" form can be found at https://ideapublicschools.org/parents/cnp. Parents/guardians can print the form, complete it, and return it to their respective Cafeteria Manager.

Households may establish a limit on the amount of prepaid funds a student may spend each day and whether a student can purchase a la carte by setting restrictions through School Café at https://www.schoolcafe.com. This gives the parent greater control of students' unpaid meal charges.

Payment

Parents may make payments to their students account and monitor their child's meal balances by contacting their cafeteria manager or by logging onto: https://www.schoolcafe.com. Parents are encouraged to set low balance e-mail reminders on their account.

Cash, money orders, and checks are acceptable methods of payment. These payments are made at your IDEA's cafeteria or designated area.

IDEA CNP offers payment plans on all negative balance accounts. To elect this option, households may contact their school cafeteria management. CNP will not apply a fee over the price of the meal or apply interest in connection with meals purchased or payment plans.

Outstanding Student Debt

Outstanding student debt (also called bad debt) resulting from nonpayment for school meals is not an allowable cost to IDEA CNP's school food service account and cannot be absorbed by IDEA CNP at the end of the school year or carried forward. If IDEA CNP allows the students to accumulate charges, and those charges are not paid (i.e., parents do not put money into a child's account), IDEA must subsidize the nonprofit school food service account for all unpaid meals. CNP maintains all documentation to substantiate a transfer of all unpaid meal debt to the school food service account each year.

Adult Meal & A La Carte Charges

Adult meals or A la Carte transactions may not be charged on an account with insufficient funds to cover the purchase. Adult meals cannot be charged to a student account. Adult meal pricing can be found at https://ideapublicschools.org/parents/cnp. Adults, including school staff, are encouraged to create an account at

www.schoolcafe.com to prepay for adult meals and a la carte charges. The cafeteria accepts cash and checks for payment of adult meals and a la carte charges.

CNP Contact Information

You may obtain important documents such as our menu, menu prices, Meal Charge Policy & Procedures, FARM applications, "Statement of Consent for Donation" form, "A La Carte on Account Charges" form, and "Courtesy Meal Implementation" form by visiting our website at https://ideapublicschools.org/parents/cnp.

For additional questions, please call (956) 377-8236 or email cnp@ideapublicschools.org.
This policy is reviewed on an annual basis by CNP.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.
To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, (AD-3027) found online at: How to File a Complaint, and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
2. fax: (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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