



2022-2023 Texas 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. 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.

IDEA CNP shall inform families annually of the availability of reimbursable school meals and families must be provided information about applying for free or reduced-price meals. Families participating at the reduced or paid rate are expected to pay for their children’s meals. When a child does not have the funds needed to pay for their meal, it is a difficult situation for both the child and the school. Families must all also be informed of the impacts of having insufficient funds on hand or in their child’s account to purchase a meal.

The purpose of this policy is for IDEA CNP to be compliant with federal, state, and local policy, and to provide oversight and accountability for the collection of outstanding student meal balances. 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.

Any changes to the IDEA CNP’s meal charge policy shall be communicated to households as necessary and appropriate at least on an annual basis.

Family Notification

Families must be notified of the Meal Charge Policy in writing annually ahead of the school year and with each new transfer student. The policy will also be posted on the IDEA website at <https://ideapublicschools.org/parents/cnp/>.

Community Eligibility Provision effective 2017-2018 School Year

Effective July 1, 2017, CNP adopted the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to provide healthy meals for breakfast and lunch to all students, at selected schools, at no charge and eliminate the collection of meal applications and income verification for subsequent school years. IDEA already offers free breakfast to all students. This adoption allows CNP to extend free lunch to all students at selected schools. Please note that if the student does not select a reimbursable meal, fees may apply for breakfast or lunch. A complete list of schools that qualify for CEP is provided below.

The IDEA school sites that qualify for the CEP for the 2022-2023 school year include:

Rio Grande Valley		
IDEA Donna	IDEA Toros	IDEA Rio Grande City
IDEA Edinburg	IDEA Alamo	IDEA Tres Lagos
IDEA McAllen	IDEA Brownsville	IDEA Elsa
IDEA Mission	IDEA Frontier	IDEA Owassa
IDEA North Mission	IDEA Riverview	IDEA Robindale
IDEA Pharr	IDEA San Benito	IDEA Los Encinos
IDEA Quest	IDEA Weslaco	IDEA Sports Park
IDEA San Juan	IDEA Weslaco Pike	IDEA La Joya

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San Antonio		
IDEA Carver	IDEA South Flores	IDEA Ingram Hills
IDEA Eastside	IDEA Walzem	IDEA Burke
IDEA Judson	IDEA Najim	IDEA Hidden Meadow
IDEA Mays	IDEA Brackenridge	IDEA Converse
IDEA Monterrey Park	IDEA Ewing Halsell	IDEA Amber Creek
Austin		
IDEA Montopolis	IDEA Kyle	IDEA Health Professions
IDEA Bluff Springs	IDEA Pflugerville	IDEA Round Rock
IDEA Rundberg	IDEA Parmer Park	
El Paso		
IDEA Rio Vista	IDEA Mesa Hills	IDEA Mesquite Hills
IDEA Edgemere		
Tarrant County		
IDEA Rise	IDEA Edgecliff	IDEA Southeast
IDEA Achieve		
Houston		
IDEA Hardy	IDEA Spears	IDEA Lake Houston
Midland & Permian Basin		
IDEA Travis	IDEA Yukon	

Schools that do not qualify for CEP, hereinafter referred to as “non-CEP”, will continue the collection of meal applications for free, reduced, and full priced meals. Since IDEA’s student population is growing, CNP will submit data annually to the state agency to determine if schools continue to qualify for CEP the following school year. CNP will notify households on an annual basis regarding the CEP status for each school.

The Student Information System of IDEA Public Schools will obtain income surveys as per state compliance to obtain social economic data for some students not currently directly certified through CEP. Income surveys are only to obtain data, and it will not affect students from CEP schools to qualify for free breakfast and lunch.

Free and Reduced Meal Applications

Families of students who attend a non-CEP school 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 2022-2023 school year can be submitted beginning July 1, 2022. The FARM application is available to families online at www.schoolcafe.com. The application is also available for physical pick up at the school cafeteria. Families also have the option of printing the FARM application from the 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. Families can visit the Child Nutrition Program Parent site for assistance with applying for free or reduced-price school meals.



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Eligibility Changes

Households may update their FARM application throughout the school year by contacting the Cafeteria Manager or reapplying online (www.schoolcafe.com) if the household has experienced any changes. For example, if the household size increases, changes in income occur, or the household begins to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Texas Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or other benefits (such as unemployment benefits), the household may update their FARM 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 FARM application.

Menu Pricing

Schools that qualify for CEP for the academic school year offer one free breakfast and one free lunch per day to all students. For students that attend a non-CEP school for the academic school year, schools shall provide free breakfast to all students. At non-CEP schools, lunch meal charges will be based on eligibility determined using information provided by the household on the FARM application. For students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, one free breakfast and one free lunch per day will be provided to the student. A lunch meal costs \$2.85 for full-priced students (household did not qualify for free or reduced-priced benefits). Menu pricing for CEP schools and non-CEP schools can be found at <https://ideapublicschools.org/parents/cnp>.

Paid Price Subsidized by IDEA

IDEA may subsidize the nonprofit school food service account for meal charges incurred by paid price eligible students who take reimbursable meals. IDEA shall review any subsidy on an annual basis. CNP will communicate to households any changes via e-mail and/or mail.

Reduced-Price Elimination

IDEA may eliminate the price for reduced-priced eligible students who take reimbursable meals making the lunch price for students with a reduced-priced eligibility \$0. IDEA shall review any price elimination on an annual basis. CNP will communicate to households any changes via e-mail and/or mail.

Meal Charge Policy

IDEA shall allow students to charge the price of their meals to an account unique to the student that may be accessed by the student's parent or legal guardian via the online meal management system, SchoolCafé, at <https://www.schoolcafe.com>. In the event that the funds deposited into the student's account have been fully expended, IDEA shall provide students a grace period that allows students to incur charges on their account for up to ten (10) additional meals. Subsequently, IDEA shall provide a **courtesy meal** to the student until any outstanding student debt has been settled in full. Once a student has incurred a negative balance on their account, IDEA staff shall notify the student's parent or legal guardian that the student's account has been depleted and that a negative balance has been incurred. Families will be notified with a phone call from cafeteria management. Families will



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also receive an email from the online meal management system. IDEA shall not apply any fees over the price of any meal or apply interest to any outstanding amount due during the grace period.

Courtesy Meals

IDEA shall provide a courtesy meal for students, including students who do not have money to pay. Courtesy meals are offered at no charge to students with negative meal balances. Any courtesy meal served is a reimbursable meal that conforms to USDA meal requirements and generally consists of a cheese sandwich, milk, fruit, and vegetable. 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.

In all cases, a student that qualifies for free meals shall not be denied a reimbursable meal even if the student has accrued a negative balance from other purchases in the cafeteria such as a la carte sales and extra items. If a student has a negative balance, IDEA may limit the student's a la carte and extra item purchases.

CNP must document and communicate to the state agency that IDEA schools have courtesy meals as part of the policy statement of collection procedures.

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 distributing the courtesy meal.

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.

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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. A la Carte items may not 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 SchoolCafé at <https://www.schoolcafe.com>. This gives the parent or guardian greater control of students’ unpaid meal charges.

Payment

Parents and guardians may make payments to their students account and monitor their child’s meal balances by contacting their cafeteria manager or by logging onto the online meal management system at <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.

End-of-Year Excess Balance

At the end of the academic school year, families have the option to donate any leftover funds remaining in their



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student's school lunch account. The donations are made to an account for students in need and the donations 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 donate 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. Excess balances for students that graduate will be refunded upon parent request.

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 in the school cafeteria. To request a refund of the student school lunch remaining balance, please visit www.schoolcafe.com.

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

Adult meals (including 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) 377-8000, email cnp@ideapublicschools.org, or visit our Child Nutrition Office at: 2115 W. Pike, Weslaco, TX 78599.

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, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.



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To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted 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; or
2. **fax:**
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. **email:**
program.intake@usda.gov

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