

## **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.

## **Community Eligibility Provision effective 2017-2018 School Year**

Effective July 1, 2017, IDEA 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 to eliminate the collection of meal applications and income verification for subsequent school years. A complete list of schools that qualify for CEP is maintained by IDEA CNP.

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. CNP shall submit data annually to the state agency to determine if schools continue to qualify for CEP for subsequent years. CNP shall notify households on an annual basis regarding the CEP status for each school.

## **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. 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. Families can visit the Child Nutrition Program Parent site at <https://ideapublicschools.org/parents/cnp/> for assistance with applying for free or reduced-price school meals.



## 2024-2025 Texas Meal Charge Policy

### **Eligibility Changes**

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.

### **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 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. Menu pricing is kept up to date on the IDEA website.

### **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.

### **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 determination on an annual basis.

### **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. 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. This policy does not apply to a la carte items. 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 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.



## 2024-2025 Texas Meal Charge Policy

### **Courtesy Meals**

IDEA shall provide a courtesy meal to all 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. 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.

### **Non-Reimbursable Meals**

Whether at a CEP or non-CEP school, if a student takes a non-reimbursable or an incomplete meal, IDEA will offer the student the option to purchase food items à la carte. In this event, CNP serving staff will prevent the overt identification of the eligibility status of the student.

### **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.

### **Payment**

Parents may make payments to their students account and monitor their child's meal balances by contacting their cafeteria manager or by logging into the CNP utilized online meal management system.

IDEA's 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 year, families have the option to donate any leftover funds remaining in their student's school lunch account. 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.

### **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. IDEA must subsidize the nonprofit school food service account for all unpaid meals.

### **Adult Meal Charges**

Adult meals may not be charged on an account with insufficient funds to cover the purchase. Adult meals cannot be charged to a student account.

### **CNP Contact Information**

Critical CNP contact information is readily available on the IDEA website.

This policy is reviewed on an annual basis by CNP.



## 2024-2025 Texas Meal Charge Policy

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, audiotope, 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.

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/ad-3027.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](mailto:Program.Intake@usda.gov)

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.