



# Unpaid Meal Charge Policy

Austintown Schools Food Service Department

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## Purpose

It is the goal of the Austintown Schools Food Service Department to provide nourishing meals to our students to help fuel their learning in the classroom. However, the Food Service Department operates as a self-funded entity, like any other business, and unpaid meal charges place a large financial burden on the Austintown Local Schools.

The intent of this policy is:

- i. To be transparent with our families on the district procedures for handling unpaid meal charges.
- ii. To establish policies that are age-appropriate for our students
- iii. To encourage parent/guardian responsibility of meal payments and charges
- iv. To outline the actions the district will take to implement and enforce the policy and collect outstanding debts

Although the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) does not require schools to serve meals to full-pay or reduced eligible students without payment, Austintown Local Schools wishes to not deny meals to our students. Outlined below are the actions the district will make to enforce the meal charge policy.

## Purchasing Meals in the Cafeteria

Every student enrolled in Austintown has a cafeteria account created during the enrollment process. Students will use their Student ID number to access their account and purchase meals in the cafeteria. Money for meal purchases can be prepaid to a student's account electronically at [K12PaymentCenter.com](https://www.k12paymentcenter.com) or by sending cash or check in an envelope, marked with the student's name and ID number, to your student's cafeteria (pay to the school's cafeteria, for example: AES Cafeteria). When a student presents in line, we serve them according to this policy, unless the parent/guardian has set a purchase restriction on the account. Restrictions must be arranged with the Food Service Office directly at 330-797-3900 ext. 2032.

## Alternate Meal

Once the charge limit has been reached an alternate meal will be served. Alternate meals will consist of nutritionally equivalent meal components, for example: whole grain cereal, choice of fruit, juice and milk at breakfast and whole grain cheese and/or meat sandwich, choice of fruit, vegetable, and milk at lunch. Because the alternate meal is nutritionally equivalent to the regular menu items, the meal will be charged at the normal rate to the student's cafeteria account. Food allergies will be accommodated.

## Charging Meals in the Cafeteria

Only complete meals can be charged to an account. Meal charges in the cafeteria are to be made in emergency situations when a student has forgotten their lunch or money. Charging a la carte or extra items is never permitted.

### Full Pay and Reduced Status Students

Students in all grade levels will be allowed to charge the equivalent of 1 week of regular meals on their cafeteria account. Once the charge limit is met, an alternate meal will be offered to the student until the debt is paid in full. All charges made on a student's account, whether for regular or alternate meals, remains the parents' responsibility.

- **Grade K-8 Students:** If a student presents to the cashier in the lunch line and has exceeded the charge limit, they will be offered an alternate meal which is charged to the student's cafeteria account at the regular price. Alternate meal charges will continue to accumulate and are the parent's responsibility.
- **Grades 9-12 Students:** High School students must have money on account or cash in hand to purchase meals. They will not be allowed to charge more than the maximum limit on their account. Alternate meals will not be offered.
- **Adults:** No charging. No purchases can be made without proper payment.

### **Free Status Students**

Eligibility for Free or reduced price meal benefits starts the date an application is approved in our system. Until that time, parents are responsible for providing a packed meal or lunch money for their students. If meals are charged to a student's account before an application is approved, those debts CANNOT be forgiven, per *Title 7 CFR 245.6*. The debt will remain on the account until the parent pays it off in full. Once a student is eligible for free meals, even with meal account debt, they will be offered the regular menu items.

### **Collection of Meal Debt**

The Food Service Department will use the following methods to notify families and collect debt:

1. Postal mail
2. Email
3. OneCall Now
4. Individual phone calls
5. In-person meeting with building principals once \$50.00 in charges is reached
6. Collection agency services utilized over the summer

For those who abuse the charge policy and accumulate an excessive amount of meal charges, a meeting with the building principal and the Food Service Director will be initiated. Also, at the end of the school year, Austintown Schools will partner with a collection agency to further attempt collection of debts.

Meal account debt is considered a school fee and remains with the student throughout their enrollment at Austintown Schools. Meal account debt will also roll over and accumulate each school year until it is paid in full. All outstanding charges must be paid before withdrawing or graduating, as transcripts will be held. As the district will continue to make efforts to collect the debt, certain privileges will be revoked, such as:

1. Report cards and transcripts held
2. Non-academic field trip privileges held
3. Fun day privileges held
4. Admission into Homecoming/Prom prohibited
5. Limiting participation in seasonal sports
6. Limiting other privileges

NOTE: This policy is exclusive to meal debt in the cafeteria and does not include academic schools fees.