

# Englewood Schools Procedure for Meal Charges, Alternative Meals, Meal Charge Debt

## Purpose

The district is committed to ensuring that all students receive the nutrition they need to engage in active learning during the school day. In accordance with applicable Federal guidance from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) has determined children and their families must be informed about how children who pay full-price (paid rate) or reduced-price for a reimbursable meal are impacted by having insufficient funds on hand or in their account to purchase a meal. There is no Federal regulation that requires school districts to serve meals to a child who does not have sufficient funds to purchase one; however, Englewood Schools has developed a practice to address this issue, as we feel it is important to ensure we feed all kids, every day, in an equitable manner. Meal charge privileges are at the discretion of the district and evaluated on an annual basis.

## **STUDENT MEAL ACCOUNTS**

Student meal accounts shall be established by the district. Parents or guardians will be encouraged to pre-pay for full or reduced price for meal. The district shall ensure that parents or guardians have access to at least one no-cost method of paying for meal services, such as the ability to pay in person. Parents or guardians will be permitted to limit the amount of funds that a student may use daily, including a la carte purchases. Students will be permitted to pay for meals and/or add funds to student accounts on the day of service.

If a student has money to purchase a full or reduced price meal at the time of the meal service, the student must be provided a meal. The student's money may not be used to repay previously unpaid charges if the student intended to use the money to purchase that day's meal.

## **UNPAID MEAL ACCOUNTS**

### Definitions

- Reimbursable Meal – Meals that are eligible for Federal Reimbursement.
- Charged Meal – Any reimbursable meal purchased that takes the account balance below \$0.00.
- Grab & Go/Alternative Meal – A meal provided at no cost to students when funds are not available to cover the cost of the planned reimbursable meal.
- A la Carte – Single items offered in addition to or separate from the reimbursable meal such as: bottled beverages, extra milk, extra entrees, snack items, etc.
- SFA – School Food Authority

### Charge Allowances- Preschool

Charged meals are allowed at the preschool level.

- Charged meals are directly charged to the student's meal account within the point of sale system.

- Charging privileges are suspended beginning the first Friday in May through the end of school year so that accounts can be brought current.

#### Charge Allowances - Grades K-6th

Charged meals are allowed up to a negative balance equal the value of three paid status lunch meals.

- Charged meals are directly charged to the student's meal account within the point of sale system.
- Students are not allowed to purchase a la carte items when their account is in the negative.
- Charging privileges are suspended beginning the first Friday in May through the end of school year so that accounts can be brought current.
- Students will be permitted to buy a reimbursable meal if they have cash in hand.

#### Charge Allowances Grades 7th-12th

Meal charges are not allowed in grades 7th-12th.

- Students will be permitted to buy a reimbursable meal if they have cash in hand.

#### **GRAB & GO/ALTERNATIVE LUNCH MEALS GRADES K-12<sup>TH</sup>**

A grab & go lunch meal is offered at no cost when a student's account cannot cover the cost of their meal:

- A maximum of 10 grab & go lunches will be offered.
- Grab & go meals are offered daily to all students as a second choice to the hot option.
- A grab & go lunch meal consists of a grain, protein, fresh fruit or vegetables, milk or water, and salad bar.

FNS Director, Supervisor and Kitchen Managers will monitor the use of Grab & Go Meals and intervene on behalf of the student when this is seen multiple times consecutively for a child. The Kitchen Manager will notify the Principal or designee that the student has been receiving Grab & Go Meals due to a negative balance after the first alternative meal is served. At this time the Kitchen Manager will request that the principal, counselor, or community liaison contact the parent/guardian with a request to either provide meals regularly for their student, provide money to purchase a school meal, or complete an application for Free or Reduced-price meals.

#### Prevention and Communication of Low/Insufficient Funds

There are a number of measures in place for all schools to prevent students and families from experiencing negative meal account balances:

- Free & Reduced-price Meal Application- Families are encouraged to complete the application for meal benefits annually. The form may be accessed through the district's Infinite Campus. Printed copies are available at every school and from the Food & Nutrition Services Office located at 4101 South Bannock Street, Englewood, CO 80110.
- Carry Over Statuses – All students with a prior year "Free" or "Reduced" status keep their status for 30 school days into the new school year, allowing time to resubmit a new school year application. Multiple communication efforts are made by SFA to prevent carryover students from "dropping" prior to their carryover status from expiring.
- Verbal Reminders – Kitchen staff will offer discrete, verbal reminders a few days before the student account balance will run out.

- Low Balance Letters – Low balance letters are mailed home monthly to families when accounts have been negative for 30 or more days.
- Low Balance Emails – Low balance letters are emailed weekly to families when accounts are below \$0.01.
- Calls- A designated school staff member or Nutrition Services Administrative Assistant will make calls to families with students whose account balances with less than the designated amount below. These calls occur two times per week until the account balance is increased above the designated amount.
  - Students with an exact balance of \$0.00 will not receive an auto call. Generally, these students are inactive or do not dine with us.
  - Families of students with full-price paid benefits will be contacted when balance falls to one paid status meal price and will be called twice a week until the account is brought back to \$0.00 or greater.
  - Families of students with reduced-price meal benefits will be contacted when balance falls to one reduced status meal price and will be called twice a week until the account is brought back to \$0.00 or greater.
- Parent Portal – Food and Nutrition Services offers an online system for families to check balances, review student purchases and make payments.
- Contact Your School – Families can contact the school kitchen directly to request to check their balance.
- Bring Payment – Parents or guardians may add funds to the students account with a credit card through Infinite Campus Parent Portal. Students may purchase a reimbursable meal with cash or check at the time the meal is served. Families may send in funds (cash or check) to add money to the student’s meal account. Checks or cash should be given directly to the Kitchen Manager or FNS office by the parent or guardian. Checks can also be mailed to:
  - Englewood Schools  
Food and Nutrition Services  
4101 S Bannock St  
Englewood, CO 80110
- Additional Action – If behavior patterns develop with students who consistently do not have money for meals, the Kitchen Manager should discuss this with the Principal, Counselor, student or family to determine the best solution for the student.

## **COLLECTIONS OF UNPAID MEAL DEBT**

Delinquent Debt – As defined by USDA, delinquent debt includes unpaid meal charges that are considered collectable, and efforts are being made to collect them. Delinquent debt, or a negative balance, remains on the accounting documents (accounts receivable) until it is either collected or is determined to be uncollectable and written off.

In collecting debt, the district shall ensure that collection efforts do not have a negative impact on the students involved and instead focus on the adult(s) in the household responsible for providing funds for student meal purchases. The district will work with parents or guardians to establish repayment plans with payment levels and due dates appropriate to the household’s particular circumstances.

- During the time a student has a negative balance or delinquent debt no a la carte purchases are allowed, even with cash in hand. Students may buy a reimbursable meal with cash in hand.

- Once the account balance is brought to zero (\$0.00) a la carte purchases may resume.

### **UNCOLLECTABLE DELINQUENT DEBT OR BAD DEBT**

Bad Debt – Delinquent debts which have been determined to be uncollectable will be reclassified as “bad debt”. Englewood Schools considers student accounts with uncollectable delinquent balances to be “bad debt” when collection efforts have been unsuccessful for twelve (12) months after a student leaves the district or graduates. Repayment of “bad debt” is an unallowable expense for the SFA; therefore, payment for this bad debt balance must come from other sources such as:

- Other non-federal sources
- The district’s general fund
- Special funding from state or local governments
- Donations

### **REFUNDS**

Families may request a refund of their student(s) meal account(s) at any time using the refund request process or can transfer the credit to a sibling’s account in the amount of the credit upon request. Transfer of credit at the point of disenrollment or graduation needs to be requested within six months of account closure. Households approved for reduced price benefits however, must receive a refund.

### **EXCEPTIONS**

Individual schools may choose to pay off student balances annually through donations or the Principal Discretionary budget to void the above charge policy regarding Charge Allowances and Grab & Go/Alternative Meals. An annual Agreement must be signed by the school’s principal, the Director of Nutrition Services and the Chief Financial Officer stating the acknowledgement that the school is responsible for negative balances left at the end of each school year and will be paid in full by either donations or school budget transfer no later than May 30 of each school year.

### **DONATIONS**

Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) recognizes that there may be occasions where community members or outside agencies not associated with the National School Breakfast or Lunch Program may want to make a donation with the purposes of funding meals for students. Guardians may also wish to donate funds from their student’s meal account upon graduation or transfer from Englewood Schools. Regardless of their source, donations will be accepted and applied to meal account debt on an ongoing basis.

The following standard practices are to be utilized when handling donation requests.

#### Definitions

- Meal Accounts - Point of Sale accounts maintained for the purpose of breakfast, lunch, and/or a la carte food or beverage purchases.
- Inactive Account - Meal account belonging to a student no longer enrolled in Englewood Schools.
- Account Balance - The dollar amount of funds in a meal account.

Receipt of donations from community and staff members:

Donations made on behalf of an individual or organization not associated with the National School Breakfast or Lunch Program will be handled as follows:

- Individual donor will fill out the School Meal Donation Form.
- FNS Administrative Assistant will accept cash/check donations made out to Englewood Schools and provide a signed donation letter to donor as proof of receipt.
- FNS Administrative Assistant will apply donated funds per policy below.
- All donations may remain anonymous.

Application of received donations:

Donations will be applied to delinquent and inactive meal accounts. The donation funds will be applied as follows:

- Meal accounts of students receiving Free meal benefits will be adjusted to a \$0 balance in order of highest delinquent debt to lowest.
- If donation funds remain, meal accounts of students receiving Reduced meal benefits will be adjusted to a \$0 balance in order of highest delinquent debt to lowest.
- If donation funds remain, meal accounts of students not eligible for Free or Reduced meal benefits will be adjusted to a \$0 balance in order of highest delinquent debt to lowest.
- If donation account fund reaches \$0 before all delinquent debts are cleared, the remaining delinquent debts will roll over to the next school year and efforts to collect from the household will continue.
- Single payer donation in excess of current year delinquent debt will be handled on a case by case basis to determine application of funds.