



Administrative Regulation 7547 STUDENT MEAL COSTS AND UNPAID CHARGES

Responsible Office: Office of Operations, Nutrition Services Department

PURPOSE

In accordance with Board Policy 7546, Nutrition Services, this administrative regulation establishes protocols related to student meals, to include costs and unpaid balances, in the Washoe County School District ("District" or "WCSD"), seeking to ensure parents/guardians are aware of these protocols.

REGULATION

1. The school administrators, school staff, and Nutrition Services Department staff are responsible for ensuring compliance with the District's policies and regulations, as well as any applicable state and federal laws and regulations.
2. Free/Reduced Meals Program
 - a. The District shall participate in the Federal School Lunch Program and offer free or reduced price meals in accordance with the guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Information related to application for free or reduced price meals shall be available and communicated to parents/guardians. The District encourages qualifying parents/guardians to apply for the program of free or reduced price school meals.
 - b. Applications may be submitted at any time during the school year; and must be renewed each school year. Eligibility in one school year does not roll over to the next school year. Free and Reduced Meal applications are available at the school office or on the District's website (<https://rocket.washoeschools.net>).
3. In accordance with U.S. Department of Agriculture rules, the District is not permitted to write off an unpaid balance on a student account. Any negative balance shall be reimbursed to the Nutrition Services Enterprise Fund by the District's General Fund or another non-federal source.
4. Elementary School - The District's "Protocols for Unpaid Charges" are as follows:
 - a. When an elementary school student's meal account contains a balance insufficient to cover the meal price, the student will be provided the regular lunch meal and any remaining balance owed will be charged to the student's account and shown as a negative balance.
 - i. At no time, shall a child be humiliated, or otherwise made to feel ashamed, due to an inability to pay for lunch.

- ii. The District will work with the parent/guardian to establish a payment plan and/or determine if the household qualifies for free or reduced price meal benefits when a hardship is claimed for any reason.
 - iii. The parent/guardian will be notified either in writing or by telephone from the Nutrition Services Department to replenish funds, submit a Free and Reduced Meal Benefit application, or communicate a hardship. When a hardship is determined to exist, District staff shall work with the parent/guardian to establish a payment plan.
- b. Negative Balance of \$20.00
 - i. If the student's meal account is not restored to a positive balance and the student continues to charge meals up to a negative twenty dollar balance (-\$20.00), the Nutrition Services Department shall communicate the negative balance to the parent/guardian.
 - ii. If the household cannot be reached, a letter documenting the communication attempt and current balance will be sent home.
 - iii. The parent/guardian may replenish funds, submit a Free and Reduced Meal Benefit application, or communicate a hardship. When a hardship is determined to exist, District staff shall work with the parent/guardian to establish a payment plan.
- c. Negative Balance of \$30
 - i. If the student's meal account is not restored to a positive balance and the student continues to charge meals up to a negative thirty dollar balance (-\$30.00), a negative balance communication to the parent/guardian from the the Nutrition Services Department shall occur.
 - ii. The school administrator or designee shall communicate that parents/guardians are accountable for the current balance, and that without a response the balance may be sent to collections at year's end. Additionally, information about meal benefit programs for which the household may apply will be provided.
 - iii. If the household cannot be reached another letter documenting the communication attempt, all above information, and current balance will be sent home.

- iv. The parent/guardian may replenish funds, submit a Free and Reduced Meal Benefit application, or communicate a hardship. When a hardship is determined to exist, District staff shall work with the parent/guardian to establish a payment plan.
- d. Negative Balance of \$50
 - i. If the student's meal account is not restored to a positive balance and the student continues to charge meals up to a negative fifty dollar balance (-\$50.00), a letter, or alternative form of communication, from the school administrator or designee to the parent/guardian shall occur.
 - ii. The communication shall state that parents/guardians are accountable for the current balance, and that without a response the balance may be sent to collections at year's end. Additionally, the letter will provide information about meal benefit programs for which the household may apply, as well as guidance counselor contact information.
 - iii. The parent/guardian may replenish funds, submit a Free and Reduced Meal Benefit application, or communicate a hardship. When a hardship is determined to exist, District staff shall work with the parent/guardian to establish a payment plan.
- e. Negative Balance of \$75
 - i. If the student's meal account is not restored to a positive balance and the student continues to charge meals up to a negative seventy-five dollar balance (-\$75.00), an intervention communication to the parent/guardian will be initiated.
 - ii. The intervention communication may be administered by a school principal or guidance counselor, citing the student's well-being as the District's top priority.
 - iii. The parent/guardian may replenish funds, submit a Free and Reduced Meal Benefit application, or communicate a hardship. When a hardship is determined to exist, District staff shall work with the parent/guardian to establish a payment plan.
- f. After 30 days, if there is no contact from the parent/guardian claiming hardship or setting up a repayment plan, the District may initiate collections with an outside collections agency. These collections efforts may include reporting of the negative balance to credit reporting agencies

and other collection efforts. However, 10 days prior to the negative balance being reported to a credit reporting agency, the parent/guardian shall be given the opportunity to appeal the negative balance through a process established by the Office of Operations.

g. Collections

- i. If charges remain unpaid following the notification process above and the household has not appealed the negative balance or the appeal has been declined, any remaining unpaid balance may be referred to outside collections as previously communicated to households through multiple collection attempts.
- ii. If charges remain unpaid at the end of the school year and communication was established indicating intended repayment, the debt will carry over to the next school year so repayment/in-house collections may continue.

h. Appeals Process.

- i. Once a student meal account balance reaches negative \$75, an intervention communication shall be initiated by the District to the parent/guardian.
- ii. Thirty (30) days after the documented intervention communication, if there is no contact from the household, a formal letter will be sent to the household stating the following information:
 1. Current balance in jeopardy of being sent to collections;
 2. Recap of previous communication attempts; and
 3. Communication of a ten (10) day window to respond to the Nutrition Services Department's Senior Accountant to request an appeal. Such communication shall include the contact information for the Nutrition Services Department.
- iii. Simultaneously, a notation will be made to the account that an Appeal Notification has been sent to the parent/guardian.
- iv. If the household responds, the household will be provided the option of completing and submitting an appeal form and/or scheduling an appeal phone call. During the appeal process, the parent/guardian shall be provided the opportunity to:
 1. Claim a hardship, if one exists;

2. Identify if a Free and Reduced Meal Application is appropriate and/or has been completed; and
 3. Allow for the establishment of a payment plan.
 - v. If the household fails to contact the Nutrition Services Department within the ten (10) day timeframe, the unpaid balance information shall be forwarded to the Office of Business and Finance to begin the collection process.
5. Middle and High School - The District's "Protocols for Unpaid Charges" are as follows:
- a. Middle and high school students who do not have money on account or in hand, or their parents/guardians, are encouraged to check with a school administrator or counselor for payment options and/or alternatives for receiving a meal.
 - b. School staff shall regularly communicate the student's meal fund balance and payment options to the parent/guardian.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS & ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

1. This policy aligns with the District's Strategic Plan and aligns/complies with the governing documents of the District, to include:
 - a. Board Policy 7546, School Nutrition Services
2. This Administrative Regulation complies with Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) and Nevada Administrative Code (NAC), and specifically:
 - a. Chapter 392, Pupils
3. This policy complies with federal laws and regulations, to include:
 - a. National Child Nutrition (P.L. 89-642) and School Lunch (P.L. 79-396) Acts

REVISION HISTORY

Date	Revision	Modification
10/20/2019	1.0	Adopted