



Unpaid Meal Charge Policy

Merit Preparatory Academy

PURPOSE:

It is the goal of the Nutrition department at Merit Preparatory Academy to offer the best possible meals to our students and staff. These meals comply with USDA standards for nutrition. Additionally, we prepare food to be tasty and interesting. Unpaid meal charges place a large financial burden on our school. Therefore, the following policy is to ensure compliance with federal requirements of the USDA Child Nutrition Program and to provide oversight and accountability for the collection of outstanding student meal balances.

GUIDELINES:

- I. Free Meal Benefit: Eligible students will be allowed to receive one free breakfast and one free lunch each day. Free and Reduced Meal Applications take up to 10 days to process and **do not** cover any previous charges. All meals received before the application approval will be charged at the “Full Price Rate” and must be paid in full. The parents/guardians of students who qualify for free meals are responsible to pay for any seconds, extra milk and/or juice, and ala carte charges. Students will generally be expected to pay for those items at the time they are received.
- II. If the student’s family receives benefits from the Special Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Family Employment Program (FEP), or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), the household qualifies for meals at no charge.
- III. Reduced Meal Benefit: Reduced eligible students will be allowed to receive a .30 cent breakfast and a .40 cent lunch each day. The parents/guardians of students who qualify for reduced priced meals are responsible to pay for any seconds, extra milk and/or juice, and ala carte charges. Students will generally be expected to pay for those items at the time they are received.
- IV. Families can apply for free and reduced priced meals at any time during the school year.
- V. Full Pay Students: Students will pay for meals at the school’s published paid meal rate each day. All full pay students shall be allowed, if needed, a small negative balance from time to time. This leeway is to give sufficient time for payment processing. If the negative balance accumulates or remains unpaid for some time, parents will be notified.
- VI. Any student with negative account balances may purchase a regular school meal, but may not purchase additional food until account balances have been remedied.

PAYMENTS

- I. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure their student has sufficient funds in their meal account.
- II. Funds should be maintained in accounts to minimize the possibility that a child may be without meal money on any given day. Any remaining funds for a particular student may/will be carried over to the next school year.
- III. A written or emailed request for a refund of any money remaining in their account must be submitted by withdrawing or graduating students. If desired, an option will be given to transfer funds to a sibling's account with a written request.
- IV. Unclaimed funds will become the property of Merit Academy's Food Service Program.
- V. Meals can be paid for electronically by going online to meritacademy.org and selecting "lunch account" under the parent tab. Payment by cash, check, or credit card may also be made in the finance office or at the main front office. Meal payments will only be accepted in the lunch line if a student/guest has the exact change or a check.
- VI. Parents using Merit Academy's online payment system may set up automatic payments to be made to the student's meal account.
- VII. Payments should clearly indicate the student account to which the funds should be credited, especially if a parent has multiple children at the school, in which case the payment must indicate which student's account along with the amount to be credited.
- VIII. The school may choose not to accept personal checks from parents who have previously provided a check that was returned from their bank for any reason, including insufficient funds.

NOT SUFFICIENT FUNDS (NSF) CHECKS

Utah law provides specific notice requirements and collection procedures after receipt of an NSF check. Therefore, a school may notify the Legal Department immediately upon receiving an NSF check. In addition, a person who knowingly issues a bad check may be guilty of a crime. Merit Preparatory Academy uses an outside collection agency to collect any and all checks returned for NSF or any other reason. Their Legal Department may notify law enforcement if it has reason to believe a person has knowingly issued an NSF check to the school.

SERVING STUDENTS

- I. School staff will exercise sensitivity and confidentiality in serving students with insufficient funds or delinquent meal accounts. Employees should communicate with parents about insufficient funds or delinquent meal accounts and should generally avoid communicating with students about their accounts. Employees shall not willfully subject a student to embarrassment or ridicule based on the student's meal account balance.

- II. The names or other identifying information of students eligible to receive free or reduced price meals shall not be published or posted in any manner, and there shall be no overt identification of any such students by any means.
- III. A student shall not be denied a meal as a form of discipline.

COLLECTION OF DELINQUENT MEAL ACCOUNTS

- I. Parents/Guardians will be notified by email if their student's lunch account has insufficient funds.
- II. If the account is not made current, written notification will be sent to the student's address on record.
- III. If the account remains negative, Merit Academy shall notify the parent/guardian that the school may begin collection efforts, including employing a collection agency, if the debt is not paid by a specific date.
- IV. School personnel will attempt to work with families to make accounts current. This effort includes setting possible payment plans and/or encouraging parents/guardians to apply for free or reduced price meals for their child, if applicable.
- V. Costs incurred from unpaid meal charges may not be absorbed by the Nonprofit School Food Service Account and must instead be restored using non-Federal funds. These funds may come from the school's general fund, special funding from State or local governments, and other non-federal sources including local contributions provided by community organizations or individuals. The finance department of Merit Academy will transfer school funds to the Child Nutrition Department in the amount owed.

CONSEQUENCES OF DELINQUENT MEAL ACCOUNTS

Schools may deny certain privileges to students whose meal account balances are delinquent. For example, a student with delinquent meal charges may be denied the opportunity to:

- Participate in graduation ceremonies
- Participate in extracurricular activities including field trips, sports, dances, etc.
- Receive a yearbook

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