

Catholic Diocese of Lexington Charging Policy for National School Lunch, Breakfast, and Snack Program

PURPOSE/POLICY:

The purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with federal reporting requirements for the schools participating in the NSLP, SBP, and ASSP programs to provide accountability for the collection of outstanding student meal balances. Unpaid meal charges have caused issues directly impacting schools and the students they serve. Prior to the pandemic charges placed a financial strain on the Catholic Diocese Food Service Department. This policy is to establish consistent meal account procedures throughout the Catholic Diocese schools. USDA strongly encourages us to steer away from shaming a child and does the methods of our schools.

Students may prepay for meals in advance electronically through mySchoolbucks or by check or cash, at the time of purchases, or post billing up to the limit of \$20.00. Free lunch students **will not** be allowed to have a negative account balance but will be served a free meal every day. A la carte items that cannot be charged are not a credited part of the NSLP reimbursement program. Reduced and paid student lunches will be allowed to charge up to a maximum of \$20.00 with parents being notified by email when the account goes negative. Once a child reaches the maximum meal charge, no charging for a la carte items, extra entrees, snacks, extra fruits, or vegetables will be sold to a child, and transactions for these items will be sold on a cash-only basis. So that the child is not shamed they will be served an Alternate entrée but reimbursable meal and it will be charged to the school account where funds come from donations. This comes from kids graduating or leaving the school and parents do not want a refund.

Parent and Visitor meals are paid for at the time of service and are not charged. Staff meals are allowed to charge up to \$20.00 but will be refused and notified before lunch that they cannot be served lunch. Parents/Guardians are emailed weekly from the central office concerning their negative accounts. If they have not responded within (3) days then the school cafeteria manager shall send parents a written notice home with the child or contact them by phone. Balances that still remain unpaid with no response may require the assistance of the director, principal, or superintendent. We also work to prevent unpaid meal charges by improving communication with families, by email or text reminding them of the options available on how to pay the student's account. All parents have access to mySchoolbucks, which keeps them up to date on their child's account and allows them to make payments. If a student is without meal money on a consistent basis, the manager will investigate the situation more closely, including contacting the parent/guardian to bring money to the school and/or encouraging the parent to apply for free or reduced-price meals.

When a check is returned to the Catholic Diocese of Lexington for non-sufficient funds procedures must be followed to recover the money. A letter will be sent certified to inform the parent/guardian from the Child Nutrition Director concerning the returned check. Payment for the NSF check must be in the form of cash, cashier's check, or money order. Payment must be received within ten (10) days of the date of the letter. The penalty fee and the amount of the check will be deducted from the child/children's account immediately upon notice from the bank. If no response is made in ten (10) days and the certified notice has been returned, then it will be turned over to the local County Attorney's Office for collection.'

The main goal, other than feeding our child/children, is to encourage the parent/guardian to assume responsibility of the meal payments and to promote the self-responsibility of the student.

USDA is working hard to provide State and local officials with all the support and resources they need to ensure they succeed in developing fair, sustainable, and transparent policies to navigate situations where children do not have funds to pay for their meals. Visit <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/unpaid-meal-charges> to find policy guidance, webinars, handbooks, training, checklists, and more.