

The policies listed in this document are guided by the OPUSD Board Policy and Administrative Regulations pertaining to Food Service Operations/Cafeteria Fund and by the California Department of Education Guidance on Unpaid Meal Charges and Excess Account Balances.

Meal Policy

Any student who comes into the cafeteria at nutrition or lunch and requests a meal will not be turned away. He/she will be provided with the reimbursable meal* (see Glossary for definition) of the day regardless of the presence or absence of funds on hand or in his/her meal account. Only if the cafeteria has sold out of the meal of the day will the staff then offer the student a different reimbursable meal. The full cost of the meal will be charged to the student's meal account, and parents/guardians must resolve all valid charges on meals requested by the student.

The cafeteria staff are unable to track when a student has rejected his/her own meal from home and wants one from the cafeteria instead. However, if a staff member suspects that that may be happening, he or she will bring the matter to the attention of the school site administration and to District administration. Parents/guardians are ultimately responsible for educating their children on family-specific rules regarding meal purchases in the cafeteria.

A la Carte or Second Meal Purchases with Insufficient Funds

Purchases of a la carte items at the snack bars or second meals in the cafeteria at Medea Creek Middle School and Oak Park High School are not allowed unless funds are available. If a student wants to make an a la carte purchase but does not have sufficient funds, he/she will be redirected to the cafeteria to get a reimbursable meal instead. Snack bars do not offer reimbursable meals.

In accordance with federal policy, students are always handed their tray or plate of food before their accounts can be accessed and charged. For food safety purposes and to prevent overt identification of students with insufficient funds, cafeterias will not take back a meal that has already been served to a student. If a student requests and has been handed a second meal before reaching the point of sale system, the staff will allow the student to purchase the second meal even if the student does not have sufficient funds to pay for it. The meal will be charged to the student's account and the negative balance must be resolved by the parents/guardians.

Charging Meals at the Point of Sale

ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: At the beginning of the school year, the District will create color-coded meal cards for all students at the elementary schools. Cards will contain the student's name, most recent class photo (if available), student identification number, and a unique barcode. Each student will have two cards, one to exchange for breakfast meals at Nutrition and the other for lunch meals. All cards will be given to the classroom teacher for safekeeping. Before each meal period, teachers will dispense the cards for the appropriate meal period to the students who will be eating in the cafeteria. Students will go up to the cafeteria window, take their meal, and hand their card to the cafeteria staff member who will verify their identity and scan the cards in the point of sale system at the end of the meal period. The cafeteria staff member will return all cards to the teachers' boxes by the end of the day.

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS: Upon receiving their meals, students will either enter their student ID number on a number keypad at the point of sale OR show their student ID card to be scanned.

Negative Balances and Debt Recovery

The District will communicate all matters concerning negative meal accounts directly with parents/guardians. School cafeteria staff will not solicit funds from students or parents. The staff at Medea Creek Middle School, Oak Park High School, and Oak View High School may alert students at the point of sale if and when their account balances are low.

Within 24 hours of a student's meal account dropping under \$0, a courtesy notice will be automatically generated and emailed to the parents/guardians whose email addresses are listed in the student information system. Parents/guardians are expected to respond to the email or refill the account within 7 calendar days. A second email notification will be sent at the end of the 7th day and once a week thereafter if no response or payment has been received and if there are no further charges on the student's account. If a student continues to incur charges on his/her account while it is in arrears, an email notification will be sent each time new charges are incurred.

If an account remains unpaid one month after the date the account first became negative, it is considered unrecovered or delinquent*. A printed notice will be mailed home and/or given to the student's homeroom teacher to hand to the student in a discreet envelope. A phone call may also be placed to the parents/guardians at the phone numbers listed on the student information system. Email notifications will continue to be generated and sent on at least a weekly basis for as long as the account remains unpaid. Printed notices and phone calls may also be used in pursuance of payment for the unrecovered debt.

If an account exceeds \$50 in negative charges, a printed notice will be sent to parents/guardians via certified mail requesting payment within 7 calendar days of receiving the notice. Additionally, families with accounts consistently in arrears may receive a phone call from the Superintendent or designee to discuss reasons for repeated delinquency and be provided with information on free and reduced-price meals or social services.

All notifications will be addressed to a parent/guardian directly and will include 1) information on the value of the negative balance at the time the email was generated; 2) request for the parent to make contact with the student nutrition department to contest a charge either via email or by telephone within 7 calendar days of receiving the notice; 4) three payment options; 5) a link to the application for free and reduced-price meals as well as a note encouraging families to apply at any time during the school year; and 6) indication of the option to enter into a payment plan to resolve the balance, if needed.

The District will track negative accounts a minimum of 3 times a week, and will record details including 1) when accounts become delinquent using the date the account initially went negative; 2) follow-up phone calls made and responses received; 3) when, where, and to whom follow-up letters were sent; 4) all relevant communications with parents/guardians. Evidence of efforts to collect unpaid meal charges will also include:

- Evidence the collection efforts fell within the timeframe and methods established by the CDE or local meal charge policy;
- Financial documentation showing when the unpaid meal charge(s) became an operating loss;
- Documentation showing when the repayment plan was agreed to by all parties (as applicable);
- Evidence any funds written off as bad debt were restored to the NSFSFA using nonfederal funding sources

Office managers at each school site may be asked to assist in the process of recovering delinquent funds on a quarterly basis.

The District will continue to provide a student with a full reimbursable meal regardless of the status of his/her account.

Delinquent/Bad Debt

Unrecovered or delinquent debt becomes bad debt when not resolved by the end of the fiscal year on June 30th. As well, if a student transfers out of the District without resolving the debt, the debt becomes bad debt.

California disallows the carryover of bad debt* from one fiscal year to the next. Federal funding cannot be used to pay off bad debt, so funds must originate from a local or state source. The student nutrition department is not expected to look for alternative funding sources.

The student nutrition department will make efforts to collect bad debt and receive payment for unpaid meal charges for up to 20 days after the last day of school. After efforts to recover bad debt have been exhausted, funds will be transferred on June 15th into the Cafeteria Fund from the General Fund (or each school's account) to cover payment of all bad debt. Any payments received from families after June 15th and before June 30th will be returned to the General Fund. Payments received after the end of the fiscal year for students still attending schools in the District will be applied to accounts for use in the fiscal year. If the student nutrition department receives payments for students who have left the District after the end of the fiscal year, the funds will also be returned to the General Fund.

Repayment Plans

Families desiring to set up a repayment plan must contact the student nutrition department before the end of the fiscal year, June 30th. Unrecovered debt that is part of a repayment plan may carry forward into the next fiscal year.

Unused Funds

Any funds remaining on an account at the end of the school year will carry into the next.

Unused funds may be refunded at any time. Parents/guardians are responsible for requesting refunds on unused funds by emailing the student nutrition department with clear instructions on where the refund check should be mailed.

After the last day of school, the District will send a one-time email to the parents/guardians of all students who have left the District notifying them of the unused funds. For students on Free and Reduced-Price meals, the District will also mail a letter to the parents/guardians. Families will have 7 days from the date the email was sent (or 7 days from the date of receipt of the mailed letter) to respond and provide directions on how to disperse the funds.

Families may opt to transfer the unused funds to siblings still attending schools in the District, request a refund, or donate the balance to help resolve any outstanding negative fund balances remaining for other students.

The District will set aside all donated funds to be used to assist families of students who need help with paying for school meals, including but not limited to, students on reduced-price meals who are unable to pay the \$0.40 charges and families who do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on federal eligibility rates but are otherwise in need.

The District will retain proof of all communications with families regarding unused balances, including instructions regarding transfers, refunds, and donations.

Fund Transfers Between Siblings

Parents/guardians wanting to transfer funds at anytime during the school year from one child's account to a sibling's account must contact the student nutrition department and provide clear instructions on how much and between which accounts the transactions should occur. The District will not automatically move funds between accounts without express instructions from parents/guardians.

Account Fraud

It is important that email addresses and other contact information are up-to-date on the student information system to ensure that parents are receiving important email notifications regarding their children's accounts.

Families are strongly encouraged to regularly track cafeteria spending via the online student information system and to contact the student nutrition department if any charges look suspicious. If a parent has a concern about incorrect charges on a child's account, he/she must contact the student nutrition department within 10 days of the time the charge was incurred to ensure prompt action in curbing fraudulent or unauthorized activity. After 10 days, all charges to the account are considered valid and must be resolved.

Authorization for Use of Funds on Extra Purchases and Other Spending Restrictions

For parents of children receiving reduced-price meals at Medea Creek Middle School, Oak Park High School, and Oak View High School who have prepaid to the cafeteria accounts to cover the \$0.40 lunch charge, an authorization form will be mailed with the eligibility letter. The form requests parents to indicate whether or not their child is allowed to use the funds in their account for a la carte and/or second meal purchases. Parents may also place a limit on a la carte purchases. It is critical that parents complete and mail back this authorization in the prepaid envelope to ensure that the funds in the accounts are used appropriately. Parents may also fax or scan and email the form to the student nutrition office.

Any parents/guardians wanting to restrict spending on student accounts for any reason should complete the appropriate form and return it to the student nutrition department.

Policy Communication

The Meal Charge Policy will be shared with all administrators and principals, and to families in "Back to School" packets, on the District's website, in student handbooks, and via email notification. Families who arrive mid-year will likewise be provided with information by the office managers at each school. Office managers at each school will be supplied with copies of the notices to include with new student packets.

All cafeteria staff will be trained on this policy.

Payment Options

CREDIT OR DEBIT ONLINE: Parents/guardians may access the online payment portal through Q-Parent Connect at <https://oakparkusd.vcoe.org/parentconnect/>. A transaction fee of 2.9% + \$0.30 will be assessed by PayPal on every payment made. Parents must enter as the PIN the email address they have on file with the District and a unique password provided to them at registration. The password can be easily reset by clicking on "Need Your Login Information?" on Q-Parent Connect.

CASH: Cash is accepted in person in the cafeterias and at the Student Nutrition office. Cash must be placed in a sealed envelope with the child's full name and student ID number (if available) clearly printed on the front.

CHECK: All checks must be made payable to *OPUSD*. Checks are accepted in the cafeterias, at the administrative office at all school sites, and at the Student Nutrition office. All checks must include the full name of the student and student ID number (if available). Checks covering payments for more than one child must include clear instructions on how the money should be divided. If a check is returned due to not sufficient funds (NSF), the full amount of the check and the NSF fee will be deducted from the student's cafeteria account. If a check has been returned due to NSF, parents must make the replacement payment using the online payment system or with cash.

GLOSSARY

A **reimbursable meal** is defined as a meal that meets all the federal nutrition requirements. At OPUSD, a reimbursable meal typically includes an entrée item, fresh fruit, fresh or cooked vegetables, a choice of milk, and any other sides or condiments relevant to a specific meal.

Unrecovered or delinquent debt refers to meal charges that have not been paid by the student(s) or parent(s) during the fiscal year.

Bad debt is considered unrecovered or delinquent debt that, after all reasonable steps have been taken, has not been recovered by, or before, the end of the fiscal year in which the debt was incurred.