

Addressing Unpaid Meal Charges

Allowable and Unallowable Practices



COLORADO
Department of Education

<p>Required Actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow only appropriate officials, who have knowledge of United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) confidentiality requirements and have a need to access a student’s account balance or eligibility information, the ability to request payment from families with unpaid meal charges (unless the family has given consent otherwise) • Provide a meal if a student has money to purchase a full or reduced-price meal at the time of the meal service <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Do not use that money towards previously unpaid charges if the student intended to use the money to purchase that day’s meal
<p>Encouraged Actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate payment reminders directly to adults in the family over the phone, email or send in a plain envelope or with other communication materials sent to all families • Offer families multiple payment options, including online payment • Continue to serve students with unpaid meal charges the regular reimbursable meal (or a low-cost, reimbursable alternate meal) in the same serving line <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure the alternate meal (if opting to provide one) is a healthy meal and does not single out students with unpaid meal charges
<p>Prohibited and Discouraged* Actions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is unallowable for the Nonprofit food service account (Fund 21) to absorb unpaid meal charges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Visit Debt and Donations Guidance resource • Withhold a diploma, transcripts or grades for unpaid fees or fines, CO state regulation (CRS 22-32-110 amended by HB 17-1301 08/2017) • Enlist volunteers, parents or guardians of other students to request payment from a family with unpaid meal charges • Suggest or require students to work off their unpaid meal charges • Publicly shame a student who is unable to pay for the regular reimbursable meal (such as grabbing a student’s tray from their hands and throwing in the trash and/or serving an unappealing alternative meal) • Announce or publicize the names of students with unpaid meal charges • Require students with unpaid meal charges to use a different serving line to receive an alternate meal • Use hand stamps, stickers, or other physical markers to identify students with unpaid meal charges • Send clearly marked notices home with students who have unpaid meal charges

*As outlined in 7 CFR 245.8, many of the discouraged actions are prohibited when applied specifically to students eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Where Can I Learn More?

[Unpaid Meal Charges](#) — CDE School Nutrition Unit
[Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge](#) —USDA