

# Jeffco Procedures for Meal Charges and Delinquent Debt 2022-2023

## Purpose

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) has determined children and their families must be informed about how children who pay full-price (paid rate) or reduced-price for a reimbursable meal are impacted by having insufficient funds on hand or in their account to purchase a meal. There is no Federal regulation that require school districts to serve meals to a child who does not have sufficient funds to purchase one; however, Jeffco has developed a practice to address this issue, as we feel it is important to ensure we feed all kids, every day, in an equitable manner. Meal charge privileges are at the discretion of the district and evaluated on an annual basis.

## Scope

The following practices will be utilized when handling unpaid meal account balances, the collections of delinquent meal payments and uncollectable delinquent debt or bad debt.

## **UNPAID MEAL ACCOUNTS**

### Definitions

- Reimbursable Meal – Meals that are eligible for Federal Reimbursement.
- Charged Meal – Any reimbursable meal purchased that takes the account balance below \$0.00.
- A la Carte – Single items offered in addition to or separate from the reimbursable meal such as: bottled beverages, milk, extra entrees, snack items, etc.
- NSFSA – Nonprofit School Food Service Account

### Charge Allowances - Grades PreK-12th

Students may charge reimbursable meals for a limited time.

- Families are expected to keep student meal account(s) current.
- Charged meals are tracked in the student's meal account within the point of sale system.
- Students may not charge a la carte items.
- Students may not purchase a la carte items with cash (bottled beverages, milk, extra entrees, snack items, etc.) when their account is in the negative.

- Communication is sent to all families twice a week with negative balances until the negative balance is cleared.

### Prevention and Communication of Low/Insufficient Funds

There are a number of measures in place for all schools to prevent students and families from experiencing negative meal account balances:

- Free & Reduced-price Meal Application - Families are encouraged to complete the application for meal benefits annually. The form may be accessed through the district's website or printed copies are available at every school and from the Food & Nutrition Services Office located at 809 Quail Street, Building 1, Lakewood, CO 80215.
- Carry Over Statuses – All students with a prior year “Free” or “Reduced” status keeps their status for 30 school days into the new school year, allowing time to resubmit a new application for the current school year.
- Verbal Reminders – Kitchen staff will offer discrete, verbal reminders a few days before the student account balance will run out.
- Negative Balance Letters – negative balance letters are emailed weekly to families with students whose account has dropped below zero.
- Auto Calls- The Jeffco Student Messenger system generates automatic calls to families with students whose account balances drop below \$0.00. These calls occur two times per week until the account balance increases above \$0.00.
  - Students with an exact balance of \$0.00 will not receive an auto call. Generally, these students are inactive or do not dine with us.
- Personal calls from Jeffco staff members to discuss payment options.
- SchoolCafé – Food and Nutrition Services offers an online system for families to check balances and make payments. Families can manage their own notification preferences or set up auto payments when the balance is low or at \$0.00
- Contact Your School – Families can contact the school kitchen directly to check their student(s) balance(s).
- Bring Payment – Students may purchase a reimbursable meal with cash or check at the time the meal is served. Families may send in funds (cash or check) to add money to the student's meal account.
- Additional Action – If behavior patterns develop with students who consistently do not have money for meals, the Kitchen Manager should discuss this with the Principal, Counselor, student or family to determine the best solution for the student.

## **COLLECTIONS OF DELINQUENT MEAL PAYMENTS**

Delinquent Debt – As defined by USDA, delinquent debt includes unpaid meal charges that are considered collectable, and efforts are being made to collect them. Delinquent debt, or a negative balance, remains on the accounting documents (accounts receivable) until it is either collected or is determined to be uncollectable and written off. Jeffco considers student accounts with negative balances to be in delinquent status.

- During the time a student has a negative balance or delinquent debt no a la carte purchases are allowed, even with cash in hand.
- Once the account balance is brought to zero (\$0.00) a la carte purchases may resume.

## **UNCOLLECTABLE DELINQUENT DEBT OR BAD DEBT**

Bad Debt – Delinquent debts that have been determined to be uncollectable will be reclassified as “bad debt”. Jeffco considers student accounts with uncollectable delinquent balances to be “bad debt” when collection efforts have been unsuccessful for twelve (12) months after a student leaves the district or graduates. Repayment of “bad debt” is an unallowable expense for the NSFSA; therefore, payment for this bad debt balance will come from other sources such as:

- Other non-federal sources
- The district's general fund
- Special funding from state or local governments
- Donations

### **Donations**

- Regardless of their source, monies received through FNS as donations to pay off negative meal balances will be deposited into a district account set up specifically for meal account donations. Donations will be distributed to student accounts district-wide on an annual basis to ensure equity for all families and schools.

## **REFUNDS, CLOSED OR “INACTIVE” ACCOUNTS**

Families may request a refund of their student(s) meal account(s) at any time using the refund request process.

When a student has graduated or otherwise dis-enrolled from Jeffco Public Schools, the meal account associated with that student will become dormant and inactive for 11 months. During this time, the student/family may request a

refund of the student's account balance or a transfer of the account balance to another family member's meal account.

Jeffco FNS will make reasonable efforts to return monies left on dormant and inactive accounts. Those reasonable efforts, at a minimum, will include sending the student/family three communications sent to the student/family's last known physical and/or email address and/or phone number, with instructions on how to request a refund or transfer of the balance prior to the expiration of the 11 months. Should a student/family not request a transfer or refund and the account stay dormant and inactive for more than eleven (11) months, Jeffco FNS will close the account, deem the balance unclaimed-property and escheat the property to the district (balances at or under \$24.99) or the state (balances at or over \$25.00).