

Oxford Preparatory Academy

Board Policy

Meal Charge Policy

Oxford Preparatory Academy (“OPA”) recognizes the important link between proper nutrition and academic success. The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent procedure for charging meals when students do not have money to pay, preventing meal charges, and ensuring eligible children are certified for free and reduced-price school meals.

Charging meals:

Because hunger is an impediment to learning, no child shall be denied a school meal because of an inability to pay. Children will be served a meal that meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrition standards for school meals.

- *OPA can allow students to charge reimbursable meals up to 5 meals or \$17.50 and then provide an alternate meal after that.*

Hand stamps, stickers, or any other means of overt identification of children with unpaid meal debt in the cafeteria or the classroom are prohibited. Additionally, children with unpaid meal debt shall not be required to work off their debt, including, but not limited to, wiping down tables or cleaning the cafeteria.

Preventing meal charges:

To ensure that all eligible families are certified for free and reduced-price school meals, OPA shall:

- provide all households with school meal applications prior to the start of the school year and/or include instructions for completing online school meal applications. Families with questions regarding the application can contact the school’s attendance clerk;
- provide access to school meal applications online in the school front office;
- provide school meal applications in the primary language of the parent or guardian and provide assistance with completing an application for any household that requests assistance;
- promptly utilize data provided by the state or other OPA officials to certify eligible children without an application; and
- assure that any child for which OPA is not able to obtain a completed school meal application, but becomes aware of their eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals shall be certified based on an application submitted by the appropriate school official, as permitted by USDA guidance.

To ensure that households are aware of negative account balances and the potential to accrue meal debt, Oxford Preparatory Schools will:

- send out low balance notices prior to students needing to charge meals;
- notify and/or work with principals, school counselors, and/or teachers to understand the student and parent’s situation and if a school meal application is needed;
- use email alerts to notify parents of negative balances.

Collecting unpaid meal debt:

When a student’s account balance has reached a negative balance of \$5.00, parents/guardians will be notified. All communication regarding unpaid meal debt shall be directed to parents or guardians. OPA may send children home with a letter in an unmarked envelope.

Prior to contacting households regarding unpaid meal debt, the school district shall ensure that the student is not participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, or other federal programs, which would confer categorical eligibility for free school meals, or is not homeless, migrant, or in foster care, and would allow them to be certified without an application.

Any household with a negative school lunch account balance shall be contacted immediately by OPA staff by email, phone, or letter home to provide information on how to apply for free or reduced-price school meals or to add funds to the school nutrition account.

For households that cannot afford to pay their school meal charges, OPA will work with them to establish a payment plan.

OPA shall take all reasonable steps to recover unpaid meal fees from families, including sending emails, making telephone calls, and/or sending letters to parents. OPA may also use funds from the nonprofit school food service account (“NSFSA”) to lower or eliminate reduced price student meal charges, as described below.

The cost to recover the unpaid meal charges cannot exceed the actual debt owed. OPA may not use parent volunteers to assist in collection of unpaid meal fees, to ensure student confidentiality. Under the federal law, bad debts are an unallowable cost to federal programs. According to federal guidance, unpaid meal charges are designated as unrecovered or delinquent debt until it is deemed uncollectable, at which time it becomes bad debt. The difference between unrecovered or delinquent debt and bad debt is described below:

- **Unrecovered or delinquent debt** refers to meal charges that have not been paid by the student(s) or parent(s) during the fiscal year, unless it meets one of two exceptions:
 - **Date of debt:** The debt is incurred less than 90 days prior to the end of the fiscal year. Under this exception, OPA will be afforded an opportunity to have a maximum of 90 days to collect the debt and receive payment for the unpaid meal charges. The 90 days will begin at the end of the claiming period for the debt incurred. At the end of the 90 days, the unpaid meal charges will be deemed as bad debt and a nonfederal funding source must repay the NSFSA within 30 days.
 - **Repayment plan:** OPA enters into a repayment plan with the family prior to the end of

the fiscal year and this process continues into the next fiscal year. For example, a family notifies the district that they are willing to make monthly payments and agrees to set up a six-month payment plan in an effort to pay off the student's unpaid meal charge balance. Under this exception, OPA can establish a payment plan for the family that allows the unrecovered or delinquent debt to carry forward into the next 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.

If OPA is unsuccessful in collecting the unrecovered or delinquent debt by the end of the fiscal year, then the California Department of Education considers the debt as bad debt and OPA must use nonfederal funding sources (e.g., Parent-Teacher Organization or general fund) to repay the NSFSA for the total amount. Unpaid meal charges shall **not** be carried over to the next fiscal year.

Households that are subsequently certified for free or reduced-price school meals at a point later in the school year shall not immediately be required to repay school meal debt accrued in that school year. OPA will retroactively reduce charges to the child's account from the date of district receipt of application.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, \(AD-3027\)](#) online and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

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Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
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Fax: (202) 690-7442; or
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