

**INDEPENDENCE CHARTER SCHOOL - WEST
MEAL CHARGE AND NEGATIVE BALANCE POLICY**

I. STATEMENT AND SCOPE OF POLICY

In recognition that proper nutrition is important to students', growth, development and readiness to learn, the Board of Trustees of Independence Charter School - West provides students, on a voluntary basis, to receive a nutritionally balanced breakfast and/or lunch which, for eligible students, is free or at reduced cost, and which is available to other students at very modest cost. The Board expects that all parents/guardians of students who are ineligible for free meals to pay for their students' meals, at full or reduced price as may be applicable, through the payment management system or cash purchases. The Board also recognizes that emergencies may arise when students will not have their meal money or an adequate balance in their meal account to purchase a meal.

To ensure that students do not go hungry and are treated in a consistent, discrete and respectful manner, to promote responsible parent/guardian behavior for providing funds for meal purchases and all outstanding balances, and to minimize the significant financial burden on Independence Charter School - West resulting from unpaid or delinquent meal accounts, the Board of Trustees adopts the following meal charge and negative balance policy, as required by federal regulations governing the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program and state guidelines.

II. RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTHORITY

The Board designates the Chief Executive Officer of Independence Charter School - West to implement this policy and to ensure that it does not have a negative effect on students involved including, but not limited to, prohibition of overtly identifying students based on free, reduced price or delinquent account balance, but instead focuses primarily on adults in the household who are responsible for providing funds for meal purchases.

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible to ensure that this policy is disseminated to staff who are responsible for policy enforcement including, but not limited to, food services staff, as well as in writing to families, including those of newly enrolled students during the school year. Beginning in school year 2017 to 2018, and each year thereafter, this policy, which shall be subject to annual review by the Board of Trustees, must be communicated in writing to all households at the start of each school year and to all households transferring to the school during the year. The policy also will be made available through other means, such as the school website, the Student Handbook or registration or back-to-school packets.

III. MEAL CHARGES AND ALTERNATIVE MEALS

1. A student may charge up to a maximum of three (3) meals on a temporary credit basis, which does not include the purchase of snacks or a-la-carte items.

2. After a student has received 3 meals on a temporary credit basis, the student will receive an alternative lunch that includes a cheese or peanut butter sandwich, fruit or vegetable, and milk. The cost of any alternative meal will be added to the student's meal account balance.

3. Once a student has received 3 meals on a temporary credit basis, his or her parent/guardian will be notified of the debt and will be given ten (10) school days to pay the amount due. If the parent/guardian fails to make full payment by the end of this period, a second notice will be sent to the parent/guardian advising that meals will not be served to the student beginning one (1) week from the date of the second notice unless payment is made in full.

4. Notwithstanding the above, in recognition that elementary school students have different nutritional requirements than students in middle school, students in grades K-5 may continue to receive an alternative meal, but students in grades 6-8 will not receive additional alternative meals unless their account is paid in full.

5. No meals will be denied to students who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals though having an unpaid meal account balance or having money "in hand" to pay for the current meal.

6. If a student repeatedly comes to school with no lunch and no lunch money, food service employees must report this to the Principal or administrative designee, who may contact the proper authorities if abuse or neglect is suspected.

7. Food services staff also must report to the Principal or administrative designee any suspicion that a student's family is abusing this policy including meal charging or alternative meals. Written notice will be sent to the student's parent/guardian that if he or she continues to abuse the policy, the privilege of charging meals will be refused.

IV. LOW AND NEGATIVE BALANCES

1. Low or negative balances must never be satisfied by cash from a student that would deny him or her the ability to purchase that day's meal.

2. No later than the end of each week, food service staff must provide the Principal or administrative designee with a list of the name and grade level of students: (i) whose meal account balance is \$5.00 or below, (ii) who have begun charging meals and/or have already accumulated 3 meals on temporary credit, and/or (iii) who have a negative balance. Upon receipt of such list, the Principal or administrative designee will ensure that notification is given to the parent/guardian of each student on the list, by email, text and/or phone call; if the school does not have auto-notification capability, same shall be established as soon as practicable, to facilitate notification as early and/or as often as may be necessary to resolve issues of low or negative meal account balances. Auto-notifications will supplement and not supplant any written notices to the parent/guardian or documented attempt to speak directly with the parent/guardian to resolve the situation.

3. At the end of each month, the Principal or administrative designee will send an invoice or bill to each parent/guardian of a student with a negative meal account balance, with a letter advising the parent/guardian to contact the Principal or administrative designee for payment or to discuss installment payments if helpful to the family. The letter also will encourage the family that pre-payment of meals, if possible, with regular monitoring of meal

account balances, helps to maintain daily nutritious meals to their student to fuel readiness to learn.

4. Because student nutrition programs are subject to confidentiality and disclosure requirements, payment reminders will be communicated only by authorized persons.

5. All accounts must be settled before a student leaves Independence Charter School - West or by the end of the school year. A final invoice and letter will be sent home approximately a week before the last day of school to families of students with negative meal account balances, with notification that unless paid in full, report cards will be held. The letter also will advise that Independence Charter School - West will take action to collect unpaid funds by collection agencies, small claims court or other legal method deemed necessary. Also, at the end of the school year, households approved for reduced price meal benefits must be processed a refund of any unused funds in their account.

V. RECORD KEEPING

1. Independence Charter School - West shall maintain proper documentation of the methods used to communicate this policy to households and staff responsible for policy enforcement, and to demonstrate how the policy was implemented.

2. The types of documents that shall be maintained include:

- Evidence of efforts to collect unpaid meal charges in accordance with the policy;
- Evidence that collection efforts fell within the timeframe and methods established by the policy;
- Financial documentation showing when the unpaid meal charge became an operating loss; and
- Evidence that the funds written off as bad debt were restored to NSFSA (nonprofit school food service account) from non-federal sources.