

POLICY

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY

Related Entries:	CND, CND-RA, JEA-RD, JPG, JPG-RA
Responsible Office:	Office of Engagement, Innovation, and Operations; Office of Teaching, Learning, and Schools - School Support and Improvement
Related Sources:	Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA, 42 USC 1751); McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, as amended, Title VII, Subtitle B; U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), SP 23-2017, <i>Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A</i> , March 23, 2017; USDA, FNS, SP 29-2017, <i>Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools</i> , 2017 Edition, May 20, 2017; Annotated Code of Maryland, Education Article, Section 7-601-605 and 7-701-704 as amended by the Maryland Cares for Kids Act

School Food and Nutrition Services Programs

A. PURPOSE

To set forth guidance regarding the ways in which Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is a partner in efforts to address childhood hunger in Montgomery County, in order to support students' ability to learn, grow, and maintain health

To establish principles and strategies to guide efforts to encourage and assist all qualified students to apply for federally funded Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARMs), while eliminating any stigma attached to, or preventing public identification of, students who qualify for FARMs

To establish expectations for providing school meals in a cost-effective and efficient manner that includes minimizing the accumulation of unpaid meal charges on students' school cafeteria accounts, and respectfully yet effectively collecting unpaid school cafeteria charges from the parent/guardians of students

B. ISSUE

1. MCPS collaborates with community partners to address childhood hunger by providing food and meal options during the school day as well as over weekends and during the summer.

2. The operation of MCPS food and nutrition services must be in alignment with state and federal requirements under the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, collectively known as the National School Meals Program (NSMP).
3. A student or student's parent/guardian is expected to provide payment for the student's school cafeteria account charges, unless those charges are otherwise funded by state or federal funds subject to income-based or other criteria. Federal regulations require that student cafeteria accounts that accumulate negative balances are to be replenished by the student's parent/guardian in a timely manner, or the costs must be absorbed by the school district and/or paid with other funds.

C. POSITION

1. The Montgomery County Board of Education affirms the principles set forth in Board Policy JPG, *Wellness: Physical and Nutritional Health*, to protect children's health, well-being, and ability to learn, and further affirms the Board's intent to mitigate the implications of childhood hunger on students' well-being and academic achievement.
2. MCPS, along with many community partners, works to address childhood hunger. These partnerships allow the establishment of various programs in low-income areas of the Montgomery County community where meals and snacks are served to children after the instructional day. The After-School Care Snack and At-Risk Supper Programs provide nourishment to students participating in a scheduled activity. The Weekend Backpack Program is a program through which community partners donate nonperishable food items to schools, which are then distributed to students to ensure nourishment over the weekend.
3. Children's learning and the need for good nutrition does not stop when school lets out for summer. The Summer Food Services Program (SFSP) provides nutritious meals to students and children in Montgomery County where there is a severe need. The SFSP is a valuable resource for our students who may be at risk of hunger and poor nutrition during the summer months. All of these programs provide children the opportunity to receive nourishment at no cost.
4. The Universal School Meals program provides breakfast and lunch at no cost to the students in a select number of schools. In addition, the Maryland Meals for Achievement (MMFA) program provides breakfast in the classroom every day at select schools, at no charge, regardless of a student's FARMs eligibility status.
5. In addition to these programs, the NSMPs address childhood hunger by ensuring that all students have access to meals during the school day. Since there is a cost associated with operating these programs, it is vital to manage them in a cost-

effective way without overtly identifying children who are unable to pay for their meal, which may result in “meal shaming.”

6. MCPS strives to provide, as appropriate, a variety of food choices that are appealing, accommodate students’ dietary restrictions, and reflect the cultural diversity of the MCPS community.
7. Parents/guardians are responsible for school cafeteria account balances incurred by their student(s). Payment is expected, in cash or through prepayment to the student’s school cafeteria account, at the point of sale at the time of purchase, or through an online prepayment system at any time.
8. All students will be treated with dignity and confidentiality regarding school cafeteria accounts.
 - a) To the greatest extent possible, all communication regarding the collection of students’ unpaid school cafeteria account balances shall be with parents/guardians.
 - b) To the greatest extent possible, consequences for unpaid school cafeteria account charges shall not be incurred by students.
 - c) No student shall be disciplined, or be restricted from school activities or events, as a result of unpaid school cafeteria account charges.
9. MCPS must collect unpaid school cafeteria account charges so that MCPS food and nutrition services maintain financial integrity and solvency.
 - a) For students who accumulate meal charges before qualifying for FARMS, no repayment shall be sought.
 - b) For students who do not qualify for FARMS, the superintendent of schools may establish a threshold of unpaid school cafeteria account charges. Parents/guardians of students who exceed this threshold will be contacted by school administration, using a variety of communication methods.
 - c) Students may not charge a la carte items to their meal account if they have a negative balance on their school cafeteria account.
10. The superintendent of schools may seek to identify funding options for unpaid school cafeteria account charges, in collaboration with community partners and others who wish to make contributions toward student unpaid school cafeteria account charges.

D. DESIRED OUTCOMES

1. MCPS will continuously seek opportunities to address childhood hunger by collaborating with community partners to provide meal and other food options during and beyond the instructional day.
2. MCPS will provide student meals in compliance with the NSMP in a cost-effective manner that minimizes the accumulation of unpaid school cafeteria account charges.

E. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

1. MCPS will develop strategies to promote consistent access to meals for students without accruing unpaid school cafeteria account charges by –
 - a) encouraging prepayment of student cafeteria accounts and the use of prepayment systems that allow parents/guardians to monitor and maintain positive account balances and replenish funds when needed;
 - b) developing effective, proactive outreach and broad-based communication strategies to encourage all students who may qualify for federally funded FARMs to apply; and
 - c) providing parents/guardians with notifications of students' cafeteria account balances when accounts approach established low balances.
2. MCPS will communicate with parents/guardians respectfully, privately, and directly to discuss negative balances and to determine methods of repayment.
3. The superintendent of schools will develop procedures to implement this policy.
4. Meal charge procedures must be provided in writing to all households with students enrolled in MCPS at the start of each school year and to households with students transferring into MCPS during the school year.

F. REVIEW AND REPORTING

This policy will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, in accordance with the Board's policy review process.

Policy History: New policy, adopted by Resolution No. 224-22 May 10, 2022.