



## Unpaid Meal Charge policy

It is the goal of the Nutrition department at Merit Preparatory Academy to offer the best possible meals to our students and staff. These meals should comply with USDA standards for nutrition as well as be tasty and interesting. The following policy is to set guidelines for collecting payment so we can continue to serve these meals to our students and staff.

### **PAYMENT**

1. It is the parent's responsibility to ensure their student has sufficient funds in their meal account.
2. Meals can be paid for electronically by going online to [meritprepacademy.org](http://meritprepacademy.org) and selecting lunch account. Payment by cash, check, or credit card may also be made in the front office. Meal payments will only be accepted in the lunch line if student/guest has exact change or a check. Payments should clearly indicate the student account to which the funds should be credited, especially if a parent has multiple children at the school, in which case the payment must indicate which student's account along with the amount to be credited.
3. The school may choose not to accept personal checks from parents who have previously provided a check that was returned from their bank for any reason, including insufficient funds.
4. If a student qualifies for free meals, no payments are due for the reimbursable meal. Parents must pay for any meals charged to their child's account prior to qualifying for free/reduced meals. Parents who qualify for free/reduced meals are responsible to pay for any seconds, extra milk and/or juice, and ala carte charges to their student's meal account.
5. If a student qualifies for reduced-price meals, no payments beyond the reduced price are due for the reimbursable meal. However, full payment will be required for any seconds, extra milk and/or juice, and ala carte charges to their student's meal account.
6. Students with negative account balances may not purchase additional food, other than the normal amount given in a regular school lunch (reimbursable meal).

### **NOT SUFFICIENT FUNDS (NSF) CHECKS**

Utah law provides specific notice requirements and collection procedures after receipt of an NSF check. Therefore, a school may notify legal counsel immediately upon receiving an NSF check. In addition, a person who knowingly issues a bad check may be guilty of a crime. Merit Preparatory

Academy may use an outside collection agency to collect any and all checks returned for NSF or any other reason. They may also notify law enforcement if it has reason to believe a person has knowingly issued to a school an NSF check.

### **SERVING STUDENTS WITH NEGATIVE MEAL ACCOUNT BALANCES**

1. A student shall not be denied a reimbursable meal based solely on the student's meal account being delinquent or containing insufficient funds to pay for the meal.
2. School staff will exercise sensitivity and confidentiality in serving students with insufficient funds or delinquent meal accounts. Employees should communicate with parents about insufficient funds or delinquent meal accounts and should generally avoid communicating with students about their accounts. Employees shall not subject a student to embarrassment or ridicule based on the student's meal account balance.
3. The names or other identifying information of students eligible to receive free or reduced price meals shall not be published or posted in any manner, and there shall be no overt identification of any such students by any means.
4. A student shall not be denied a meal as a form of discipline.

### **COLLECTION OF DELINQUENT MEAL ACCOUNTS**

1. Parents using Merit Academy's online payment system may set up for automatic payments to be made to the student's meal account.
2. If a student's account balance reaches zero (0), he/she will not be denied a meal for insufficient funds. A student account with insufficient funds to pay for a meal will continue to be charged each time the student receives a meal, thus incurring a negative balance owed and becoming delinquent. A delinquent meal account is a debt owed by the student's parent that can be collected by Merit Preparatory Academy.
3. At least once every month the kitchen staff will contact the parents of all students whose meal account is delinquent. The kitchen staff will keep a correspondence file, either paper or electronic, of their interactions and conversations with parents with delinquent accounts. This file will be provided to the school director.
4. The school director or other designee will contact the parent of a student whose meal account balance shows a debt of **\$30.00** or more. The designee may not be a kitchen employee.
5. The school director or other designee will send written notice to the parent of a student or former student whose meal account balance shows a negative balance of **\$50.00** or more. The notice may inform the parent that the school will begin collection efforts, including

employing a collection agency, if the debt is not paid by a specified date and may incur additional fees up to 40% of the total balance.

6. If a debt is not paid by the date specified in the written notice as outlined in the paragraph above, the school director or other designee may assign the debt to a collection agency with which Merit Preparatory Academy has contracted, or may file a civil action in court to collect the debt. The director or designee will send written notice to the parents notifying them of the assignment or intent to file civil action. The director or designee will also notify the Child and Nutrition Department of the assignment of filing of a civil suit. A 40% fee will be added to any account that goes through collections.
7. The Child Nutrition Department and the school at which a debt is accrued shall work together to determine when to designate a delinquent account as bad debt and cease collection efforts, in compliance with federal laws and regulations regarding bad debt as defined by the USDA. The internal transfer of funds between a school and the Child Nutrition Department does not extinguish or satisfy debts owed by parents to Merit Academy and a delinquent account remains collectable until the Child Nutrition Department and school designate it as bad debt under USDA regulations.
8. Costs incurred from unpaid meal charges may not be absorbed by the Nonprofit School Food Service Account and must instead be restored using non-Federal funds. These funds may come from the school's general fund, special funding from State or local governments, and other non-federal sources including local contributions provided by community organizations or individuals. The Finance Secretary will transfer school funds to the Child Nutrition Department in the amount owed.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF DELINQUENT MEAL ACCOUNTS**

1. Schools may deny certain privileges to students whose meal account balances are delinquent. For example, a student with delinquent meal charges may be denied the opportunity to:
  - Participate in graduation ceremonies
  - Receive a yearbook

Created: September 26, 2022

Board Approved: 10/18/22