

2025-2026 AZACS -Unpaid Meal Charge Policy



Purpose of this policy:

To outline procedures for providing meals to students without funds, prevent unpaid balances, avoid overt identification based on meal payment status, and ensure eligible students are enrolled in the Free and Reduced-Price Meal Program.

Meal Service Overview:

AZACS participates in the National School Lunch Program and serves breakfast and lunch daily. Families are informed annually about the availability of reimbursable meals and how to apply for free or reduced-price meals. This policy is shared at the start of each school year, with enrollment packets for new students, on the school website, and available upon request.

Meal Prices (2025-2026 School Year):

- Lunch \$4.25
- Breakfast \$2.25
- Reduced price meals are free for the 2025-2026 school year until further notice.

Meal Charges

- Students eligible for free meals will never be denied a reimbursable meal.
- Students who qualify for reduced-price or paid meals must have funds available or a pre-order in place to receive the daily menu item.
- Students without funds may be offered a nutritious alternative meal to avoid disruption and overt identification.

Preventing Unpaid Meal Charges:

- Applications for free or reduced price meals are available after July 1 at each school site and through the Lunchtime Meal App Portal:
<https://mealapp.lunchtimesoftware.net/>
- State data (e.g.,SNAP, Medicaid) is used promptly to certify eligible students without an application
- Meals must be pre-ordered and prepaid monthly at:
<https://www.schoolpaymentportal.com>
- Cash or check payments can be accepted at the front office (payable to Arizona Autism Charter School)

- **If a student has not prepaid for a meal, they still may be served upon request. The student may accrue unpaid meal charges.** Families are advised to **OPT OUT** of the lunch program if they do **NOT** want their student served a meal by contacting the Student Nutrition Manager at hvaughan@autismcharter.org **before meal service begins in August.**
- Students without a pre-order or sufficient funds may receive an alternative bagged meal, served discreetly alongside other options. Families are encouraged to monitor student account balances and meal preorders through the <https://www.schoolpaymentportal.com>.

Managing and Collecting Unpaid Meal Debt:

- If a student eats without prepayment, the charge will be added to their account.
- Households are notified of negative account balances by e-mail or phone call from the Student Nutrition Manager, Holly Vaughan. (hvaughan@autismcharter.org)
- Families will be given information on how to apply for free or reduced-price meals if they haven't already done so.
- Once approved for free meals, families are not responsible for prior debt, but early application is strongly encouraged to avoid financial losses to AZACS.
- Repayment plans may be arranged for families experiencing financial hardship.
- Meal charge/Student account balances may be checked at any time by visiting <https://www.schoolpaymentportal.com> or by contacting Holly Vaughan at hvaughan@autismcharter.org

Debt Follow Up and Year End:

- Negative balances must be resolved before the end of the school year or will carry over to the following school year
- AZACS will continue outreach efforts to respectfully collect outstanding meal balances by contacting the parent or guardian responsible for the student until the debt is fully resolved
- Prior to contacting families, AZACS will verify whether the student qualifies for automatic eligibility (e.g.,SNAP/TANF/homelessness, foster care).

Staff Training

This meal charge policy is reviewed with all school personnel involved in meal service and family communication to ensure consistent, respectful implementation.

This institution is an equal opportunity employer.