

AZACS -Unpaid Meal Charge Policy



AZACS participates in the National School Lunch Program and serves breakfast and lunch daily.

Purpose of this policy:

The purpose of this policy is to establish a procedure for serving meals when students do not have money to pay, preventing unpaid balances, preventing overt identification of payment status, and ensuring eligible children are certified for free and reduced-price school meals.

Meal Charges:

All children in attendance at any AZACS' school participating in this federal school meal service program are annually informed of the availability of reimbursable school meals and are provided information about applying for free or reduced-price meals at the beginning of the school year.

This unpaid meal charge policy will be made available to all families by providing this policy document with the application and instructions for applying for free and reduced-price school meals at the beginning of the school year. Families transferring in during the school year will receive this policy in their new student packet. In addition, this policy will be available upon request from each school's front office and posted on the school's website.

This meal charge policy addresses children who are participating at the reduced price or paid rate but who do not have money, in their pre-paid account or in hand, at the time of service, to cover the cost of the meal. No student eligible for free meals will be denied a reimbursable meal for any reason. All non-eligible students will be charged for their meal.

Preventing Unpaid Meal Charges:

- Meal applications are made available prior to the start of the school year, throughout the school year, and are included in new enrollment packets in both English and Spanish and other languages upon request.
- State data is promptly utilized to certify eligible children without an application.
- Meals are able to be paid for in advance: AZACS utilizes a pre-order, pre-payment system that requires parents/guardians to pre-order meals, online, monthly, and in advance, at: **Lunchtime**. This pre-payment and marking served system prevents overt identification of a student's meal payment status at the point of service, the only information displayed at the POS is the student's name and order status.
- If needed, students/families may make payments for their meals in the front office by check or cash if they do not have access to the internet/LunchTime Credit card payment portal. All payments need to be made out to Arizona Autism Charter School.

- If a student has not prepaid the cost of the meal at the time of service, the student will still be served if they request a meal. The only time a student will not be served is at the parent/guardian's request. When a student is marked served at the POS, that meal will be charged to the student's Lunchtime account at the standard lunch rate based on their meal payment status (free/reduced/paid). AZACS charges \$3.55 for lunch, and \$2.00 for breakfast. Reduced price meals are Free at AZACS for the 2023-2024 school year until Pandemic Benefits run out. Families will be notified if Pandemic benefits run out and reduced meals will need to be paid for at the reduced rate.
- Households are notified promptly of negative account balances and the potential to accrue meal debt by e-mail or phone call.

Collecting Unpaid Meal Debt:

Communication regarding students unpaid meal debt shall focus primarily on parents or guardians in the household responsible for providing funds for meal purchases : The parents or guardians of a student who requests and receives a meal that was not ordered and paid for in advance will be notified via e-mail or phone call that a meal was consumed and a charge was placed on their Lunchtime account and is due.

Information will also be provided at this point of contact on how to apply for free or reduced price meals if the family is eligible and has not submitted an application. If a household is subsequently certified for free school meals at a point later in the school year they shall not be required to repay school meal debt accrued prior to the certification date of the application. If there is a financial hardship the student nutrition manager can discuss payment options such as an individualized repayment plan if needed. Meal balances may be requested at any time by contacting Food Services- Holly Vaughan, Student Nutrition Manager at hvaughan@autismcharter.org

Prior to contacting households regarding unpaid meal debt, the student nutrition manager shall ensure the student is not participating in SNAP, TANF 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.

Carry-Over unpaid meal debt:

The Student Nutrition Manager will maintain documentation of each household communication interaction regarding unpaid meal balances. **Negative balances must be cleared up before the end of the school year. Notification will continue until the debt has been paid. All negative balances at the end of the school year will carry over to the next school year.**

This meal charge policy is provided to and is reviewed with all school level staff responsible for policy enforcement, including food service personnel responsible for meals service at the POS, and food service staff responsible for notifying families of outstanding balances.

This institution is an equal opportunity employer.

