Purpose
The Baltimore County Public Schools’ (BCPS) Office of Food and Nutrition Services (OFNS) participates in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). The OFNS provides nutritious and well-balanced meals also known as reimbursable meals that follow the meal pattern guidelines as set forth by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Federal funds are collected for reimbursable meals served to all students. Meals served to students may be purchased at the published school prices or at a reduced price for eligible students.

USDA program requirements prohibit schools from denying meals for disciplinary reasons.

Procedures are established for the provision of providing meals to students who have insufficient funds in their school meal accounts and for the collection of unpaid meal charges.

Access to School Meals
School meals are available free or at a reduced price for those who qualify. Households may apply for subsidized meals at the beginning of, and any time, during the school year. Meal benefit applications are available online at myschoolapps.com.

Households whose children are directly certified based on receipt of Food Supplement Program (formerly known as Food Stamps) benefits, temporary cash assistance benefits, foster child status, or confirmation of a homeless, migrant, or runaway situation are automatically eligible for free meals and do not need to submit a meal benefit application.

BCPS students’ eligibility from the previous school year will carryover for the first 30 school days or until a new application has been processed.

Meal Payments
Students purchasing full-priced school meals must pay for meals at the time of service. Households with students eligible for subsidized meals must pay for meals at the time of service.

Payment for student meals may be made using any of the following options.
- Cash at point of sale (POS).
- Cash or personal check submitted to school cafeteria in advance for deposit into a prepaid student cafeteria account.
- Online credit card prepayment service with MySchoolBucks (MSB) credited to the student’s cafeteria account.

Snacks and A La Carte Items
- Credit will not be extended for a la carte or snack foods, except for milk.
- Snacks and a la carte items cannot be purchased when student meal account is negative.

MySchoolBucks (MSB)
MSB is an online prepayment system for parents/guardians to pay for students’ school meals using a credit/debit card. A processing fee is charged for each prepayment transaction.

Parents/guardians set up an account at www.myschoolbucks.com using the student’s name, ID number, and school name to complete the process. MSB provides parents/guardians the option to set up notifications to add money to the students’ meal account when funds are getting low, set spending limits, and view account balances and meal purchases made throughout the school year.

An MSB account may also be set up for parents/guardians who choose to pay using cash or personal checks to view and monitor the student’s cafeteria activity and check their balance.

**Monitoring Meal Accounts - Extended Credit**
Well-nourished students are more engaged and perform better in school. The OFNS recognizes parents’ and/or guardians’ responsibility to provide sufficient funds to cover meal charges. Families are encouraged to keep their student’s meal account balance positive.

There may be situations that arise when students forget their money.
- Credit will be extended, and a meal will be provided.
- Extending credit to adults will not be permitted.

Extended credit creates a negative account balance for that student and requires repayment.

**Collection: Repayment of Negative Balances**
All grade level meal accounts can extend credit. This creates a negative account balance. The OFNS must collect on negative balances.
- A negative balance letter will be emailed to all grade levels once per week by the OFNS Central Office.
- This collection letter will also be supplied to the elementary school administrative office for ensuring distribution to the students’ homeroom mailbox to be sent home with students. Collection letters will continue until account is paid in full.
- Any money received will be deposited into the student’s account and applied to the negative balance.
- Instances whereby students provide cash for a day’s meal, they will receive that meal while the negative account balance remains collectible.
- Negative account balances that are not paid are considered delinquent. Efforts will be made to collect outstanding balances throughout school year.
- Uncollected meal charges are considered bad debt and must be restored using non-federal funds to cover the loss.

**Low Balance Accounts**
Proactively reminding families of a student’s low account balance will be initiated by the cafeteria manager and person in charge.
• Low balance letters will be printed weekly on Fridays for elementary paid student accounts of $6.00 or less.
• Elementary low balance letters will be folded, stapled and given to the school’s administrative office to be placed in the teachers’ homeroom mailboxes to be sent home with students. These letters will have no identifying information from the OFNS displayed on the exterior of the letter.
• Parents utilizing the MSB online prepayment system may set meal balance parameters which send automated e-mail alerts when the student’s balance reaches the set low-balance level.

School Prepaid Accounts
Local contributions provided by community organizations or individuals may be used to set up a School Prepaid Account, also known as SPA. Donations will be accepted to cover students with negative balances on an individual or school wide basis in consultation with the school administrative staff and the OFNS staff.

End-of-Year Carryover/Refunds
Meal account balances are automatically carried over to the next school year for returning students.
• Students with a reduced-price eligibility status transferring out of the school system or graduating must receive a refund.
• Students with a paid eligibility status who are transferring out of the school district or graduating may receive a refund upon written request using the established refund request form from the OFNS website.
• Households may designate unused meal account balances to another sibling’s meal account or donate the unused meal account balance to help cover other students’ negative meal account balances.

All refund requests will be processed by an OFNS representative.

References