



ZCSD 2026-2027 ALTERNATE MEAL GUIDANCE

No student has or will ever be denied a meal, no matter the circumstance.

Students who are classified as free or reduced would not be affected by alternate meals.

Parents and guardians are encouraged throughout the school year to apply to receive these benefits. *Those who do qualify must reapply each school year.*

For paying students, when a meal account balance exceeds \$20, the student will receive an alternate meal until the balance is paid.



APPLY HERE



It is a necessary step to keep our Child Nutrition Program financially stable while still ensuring every child receives something to eat.

The alternate meal will be a **sandwich, fresh fruit of the day, and a choice of milk.** Students with allergies will receive an appropriate substitute option.

Many have asked why the district cannot simply pay off meal debt or offer free meals to all students. Even if the district paid the current \$35,000 in unpaid meal charges, it would not resolve the larger financial reality. To provide universal free meals for all students, our program would need approximately an additional \$1 million every year.

This cost comes from several factors:

- Federal reimbursement rates do not cover the full cost of producing a meal.
- Food, supplies, and labor costs continue to rise.
- Child Nutrition Programs must operate independently and cannot use general education funds.
- Equipment maintenance and replacement are funded through the nutrition program.
- Districts with lower percentages of free and reduced-price students receive significantly less federal funding and do not qualify for programs that allow universal free meals.

Because of these constraints, we must follow federal guidelines and maintain financial responsibility to ensure the long-term stability of our program.

Thank you for your partnership and support. Our number one priority each day is the safety and well-being of our students and staff. Please reach out to us with any additional questions.



Additional **Community Resources** can be found here.

