



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE EDUCATION ACTIVITY

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## **Southeast District reconciling debts for student meals**

The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) Americas Region is reconciling unpaid balances for the Student Meal Program (SMP) prior to the end of School Year 2022-2023. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the USDA subsidized the National School Lunch Program, to include the DoDEA SMP, so students could receive free meals, but that subsidy has since expired.

“The Student Meal Program has returned to a pay-as-you-go program,” said DoDEA Americas Logistics Chief Mike Ryan. “The program receives limited appropriated funds support, which means the program is made sustainable through revenue from parents whose children participate in the SMP,” he added. Ultimately, if parents don’t reconcile their school meals debt, it could jeopardize the continued operation of the school meals program in their community. “The school meal program could be suspended or eliminated if it can’t maintain fiscal self-sufficiency,” said Ryan.

DoDEA Americas operates 50 schools in two districts located in two countries, seven states, and one territory across three time zones. Approximately 50 percent of DoDEA Americas’ 20,000 students participate in the SMP. “The DoDEA Americas School Meals Program is dedicated to building student health and academic achievement in our communities,” said Ryan. “Daily access to nutritious foods is the foundation for students to achieve their full academic potential,” he added. The program also employs more than 200 people across the region. “The cafeteria staff in our schools do incredible work providing budget friendly, nutritional meals for our students.”

Parents can bring cash to their respective schools or log into their Titan Account (<https://family.titank12.com>) to pay off school meal balances. “Creating an online account is certainly the preferred method of paying for school lunches,” said Ryan. “Parents can fund the online account with a checking or savings account, or link a credit card,” said Ryan. Parents can also set up recurring contributions to avoid falling into and creating a large unnecessary debt, he added.

The Free and Reduced Meals program is another way to avoid accumulating large school meal debts. An approved meal application may qualify families for benefits from local, state and federal agencies, too. “Eligibility for free meals or reduced-price meals is determined by a combination of income and family size,”

said Ryan. “Many military families can qualify, and the best part is the application is anonymous,” he said.

DoDEA Americas’ mission is to educate, engage, and empower military-connected students to succeed in a dynamic world. “Partnerships with families and military communities are an essential element to student-centered excellence,” said Ryan. “We all have a vested interest in working together to ensure the long-term sustainability of the student meal program.”

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Printed on Thursday, May 22, 2025 - 07:01. For the latest version of this content please visit <https://www.dodea.edu/print/pdf/node/150466>.