

Date Issued _____

Effective Date _____

Example School District Meal Charge Policy

Instructions for Prototype School District Meal Charge Policy:

This prototype is designed to give you an example to meet minimum unpaid meal charge requirements. This example policy does not cover the entirety of possible unpaid meal charge policies. Please reference the USDA's *Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge* guidebook for a more comprehensive guidance tool. The **text in red** includes some common practices that may occur in some schools.

I. Federal Requirement

The purpose of this policy is to address the need for school food authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) to institute and clearly communicate a meal charge policy, which would include, if applicable, the availability of alternate meals. Because all students in participating schools may receive reimbursable school meals, all SFAs must have a policy in place for children who are participating at the reduced price or paid rate, but either do not have money in their account or in hand to cover the cost of the meal at the time of service. Such a policy ensures that school food service professionals, school administrators, families, and students have a shared understanding of expectations in these situations.

This requirement is referred to a “policy,” but whether this is referred to as a “policy” or “standard practice” is at the discretion of the SFA. Regardless of terminology is used, the policy or standard practice must consist of a written document explaining how the SFA will handle situations where children eligible to receive reduced price or paid meals do not have money in their account or in hand to cover the cost of their meal at the time of service. The policy or standard practice must be implemented throughout the SFA.

You can find more information about this US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) requirement at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/unpaid-meal-charges>.

II. PURPOSE OF POLICY:

The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent meal account procedures throughout the district. Unpaid charges place a financial strain on the food service department. The goals of this standard of practice are:

- To treat all students with dignity in the serving line regarding meal accounts
- To support positive situations with district staff, district business policies, student and parent/guardian to the maximum extent possible
- To establish policies that are age appropriate
- To encourage parent/guardian to assume the responsibility of meal payments and to promote self-responsibility of the student
- To establish a consistent district policy regarding charges and collection of charges

III. SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY:

- The food service department, Business Manager, Administrative Assistant (or name another position responsible for this position): Responsible for maintaining charge records and notifying the student's parent/guardian.
- The Parent/Guardian: Immediate payment

IV. ADMINISTRATION

1. Families are encouraged to apply for free and reduced price meal benefit. Any family that falls into a negative balance will receive a written notification to encourage them to apply for free or reduced price meal benefits.
2. Families are encouraged to pre-pay for meals and money is accepted in the school office daily for payments on the day of service. Written notification of prepayment options occurs at the beginning of each school year, is given to each new transfer student, is posted on the Food Service website, and is included in the student handbook.
3. Families will be notified of the school Unpaid Meal Charge Policy in writing before the school year begins and with each new transfer student. This policy will also be posted on the Food Service Website.
4. **(Optional)** SFAs may limit the amount of funds that a student can use daily for a la carte purchases. (Insert a statement about families are notified of this option and how a family can select this option).
5. **Elementary students:** (Insert a statement of how notices will be sent to parent/guardian. For example, overdue slips will be attached to the student's ID cards and sent to the student's classroom to be handed out to the student by the teacher.)

- a. Calls on delinquent accounts are made on a daily basis to try to collect payment.
 - b. All delinquent accounts at the beginning of May of the current school year will be subject to collections for payment.
 - c. If a child has money to purchase a reduced price or paid meal at the time of the meal service, the child must be provided a meal. SFAs may not use the child's money to repay previously unpaid charges if the child intended to use the money to purchase that day's meal.
6. **Middle School students:** (Insert a statement of how notices will be sent to parent/guardian. For example, overdue slips will be sent home with students whose accounts are a low or negative balance.)
- a. Calls on delinquent accounts are made on a daily basis to try to collect payment.
 - b. No charges are allowed for extras or a la carte foods on any negative accounts or accounts with a zero balance.
 - c. All delinquent accounts at the beginning of May of the current school year will be subject to collections for payment.
 - d. If a child has money to purchase a reduced price or paid meal at the time of the meal service, the child must be provided a meal. SFAs may not use the child's money to repay previously unpaid charges if the child intended to use the money to purchase that day's meal.
7. **High School students:** (Insert a statement of how notices will be sent to parent/guardian. For example, food service workers will inform students of delinquent accounts in the checkout line.)
- a. Calls on delinquent accounts are made on a daily basis to try to collect payment.
 - b. No charges are allowed for extras or a la carte food on any negative account or accounts with a zero balance.
 - c. No charging allowed for any high school student beginning April until the end of the year.
 - d. All delinquent accounts at the beginning of May of the current school year will be subject to collections for payment.
 - e. If a child has money to purchase a reduced price or paid meal at the time of the meal service, the child must be provided a meal. SFAs may not use the child's money to repay previously unpaid charges if the child intended to use the money to purchase that day's meal.
8. **(Optional policies)** Denying meals or providing alternate meals. Describe when and how this is done in a manner that prevents embarrassment to the child in the meal service line.
- a. If an alternate meal is served that meets meal pattern requirement, those meals may be claimed for reimbursement. If an alternate meal is served that does not

meet meal pattern requirements, those meals may not be claimed for reimbursement and the food used for alternate meals must come from funds outside the non-profit school foodservice account.

9. **(Optional)** Establish long-term payment plans for households struggling to pay back a negative balance. Unpaid meal charges may be carried over at the end of the school year (i.e., beyond June 30) as a delinquent debt and collection efforts may continue into the new school year. This allows SFAs to work with individual families to establish longer repayment plans and to continue pursuing collection efforts when children change schools within the district or move to a new school outside the district. When local officials determine further collection efforts for delinquent debt are useless or too costly, the debt must be reclassified as “bad debt.”