

Regulation
Food Services Management - Unpaid Meal Charges

Descriptor Code: EE-R(0)

This regulation implements the District goals and objectives for unpaid meal charges and alternate meals as outlined.

USDA REQUIREMENTS

The USDA has set certain standards and guidelines to be followed in the development and implementation of a policy or procedure on unpaid meal charges and alternate meals.

- A. A policy or procedure must be in place by July 1, 2017 for any district with schools not participating in Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) district-wide.
- B. Each State Food Authority (SFA) and Local Food Authority (LFA) has the discretion to set their own policy or procedure but should consider the following:
 - Maintain the financial integrity of the Programs
 - Provide children with adequate nutrition to focus in school
 - Minimize stigmatization of children with meal charges – no negative impact
 - Different payment options
 - Identify the stakeholders involved
 - Delinquent debt against the School Nutrition Program
 - Establish standard operating procedures for schools
 - Policy information must be shared annually at the start of each year with schools, parents, and School Nutrition personnel in direct contact with the students. Information should also be shared with students transferring into the district throughout the year. Examples: Student Handbooks, General Administrators' meetings, School Nutrition trainings, MCSD website, and/or again to parents after all avenues of payment has been exhausted.
 - SFAs must maintain documentation of policy communication methods.
 - SFAs must provide policies to the State agency during the Administrative Review

UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- a. Elementary students may charge up to three (3) breakfasts and three (3) lunches before an alternate meal is given. Middle and high school students may charge up to one (1) breakfast and one (1) lunch. There are no provisions for adult meal charges.
- b. No a la carte items may be charged.
- c. Students may not charge meals after May 1st for the duration of the school year. All outstanding charges must be paid by the end of the school year.
- d. Unpaid meal charges are rolled over into the next school year as delinquent debt and remain on the student's account until paid.
- e. Any meal charges are considered a debt against a federal program and must be repaid.
- f. Bad debt costs are unallowable. SNP account funds may not be used to cover costs related to bad debt and may not be absorbed.

PAYMENT OPTIONS

- Cash daily
- Pre-pay for meals with cash or through the School Nutrition on-line payment system.
- Meal re-payment plans can be set up for outstanding charges

FREE AND REDUCED MEAL APPLICATIONS

- Meals at any time during the school year, especially if their financial status changes.
- Any student transferring from a CEP school, free, to a non-CEP school, paying, will have

a 10 day grace period in meal status to give them time to submit a Free and Reduced Meal Application.

- Students will begin the new school year with the same status as the previous year. A 30 day grace period is given to give time to submit a new Free and Reduced Meal Application. If no new application is received, the student's status becomes paid after the grace period has ended.
- Parents are responsible for meal payments until a Free and Reduced Meal Application has been submitted and approved.

SCHOOL PROCEDURES FOR UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- a. Negative balance letters will be sent home weekly beginning as soon as the student's account becomes delinquent. For those accounts that have reached or exceeded the limit, letters will be sent home multiple times during the week. Telephone calls will also be made to the parents.
- b. Principals will be informed of the outstanding charges and made aware of the steps taken to collect the debt owed. Ask for assistance in contacting parents before having to serve an alternate meal.
- c. Send the Outstanding Balance Report weekly to the SNP office. A Connect-Ed call will be made to parents advising them of the outstanding balances.

Procedures for Alternative Meals

When funds allow, a School Lunch Fund account at all non-CEP schools will be activated to help students who may not have money for meal purchases. Students will be allowed to use this fund for two (2) days before an alternate meal is given.

After all avenues have been exhausted and you are forced to serve the alternate meal, speak to the student's teacher before lunch and let them know the student needs to see the Manager when they come to the cafeteria. A good practice would be to leave the list in the teacher's mailbox at the end of the day so he/she would have it first thing the following morning.

If payment is not received in time for meal service, an alternate meal will be provided. One suggestion is to place it in a bag with a smiley face or something cute on it. Remember, it is not the student's fault. Be sensitive to them and avoid embarrassment. There should be no negative impact on the students.

If a student that has met/exceeded the charge limit comes through the line and already has a tray, ask the child to come to the Manager's office after he finishes his meal. From there have the child call the parent and let you speak to them. Advise the parent of the meal charges, that you served the student that day, and if no money is received the following day, the student will be given an alternate meal. Recheck to make sure the student's name is on the list provided to the teacher. Never take a tray from a student and throw the food away.

If a child has money to purchase a reduced or paid priced meal at the time of meal service, the child must be provided a meal. This money may not be used to repay previously unpaid charges if the child intends to use the money to purchase that day's meal.

ALTERNATE MEALS INCLUDE

- Breakfast – cereal, fruit and milk
- Lunch - peanut butter sandwich or a cheese sandwich, fruit, vegetable, milk

ACCOUNT COLLECTIONS

If parents are not being responsible in providing meals or payments for students, principals may contact school social workers or the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFACS) for assistance as needed. Students who repeatedly abuse the payment policy may not be allowed to charge in the future.

If the school continues to be unable to collect outstanding charges from student's parent/guardian, the student may not be allowed to participate in senior activities including commencement or extra curricula activities.

CHANGES IN STATUS

At any time during the school year, if a family income decreases, an application for free or reduced price meals may be completed to determine eligibility.

Muscogee County School District

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