

I. Policy Statement

The Board of Education is committed to ensuring compliance with the requirements for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Nutrition Program, the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. The Board acknowledges the need for all students, regardless if the student is eligible for Free Meal Benefit, Reduced-Price Meal Benefit, or is a Full Pay Student, to have a healthy meal while treating all students with dignity and confidentiality regarding meal accounts.

In order to ensure that no student goes hungry or is traumatized for lack of funds, the HCPSS establishes processes to provide meals or alternative meals to students who cannot afford to purchase meals and will provide oversight and accountability regarding the collection of outstanding student meal balances. In addition, the HCPSS will work with schools and community partners to provide temporary relief for parents who do not qualify for the free or reduced-price lunch or breakfast program, yet struggle to pay for their student's meals.

II. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline how schools handle providing meals to students when payment cannot be collected at the point of service, while maintaining the integrity of the food service program and the dignity of students and households.

III. Definitions

Within the context of this policy, the following definitions apply:

- A. A La Carte Items – A variety of additional, approved and compliant food items that may be purchased to compliment school meals or meals brought from home. These extra purchases require funds to be available (on meal account or in hand) at the time of purchase.
- B. Alternate Meal – A meal provided to students who do not have money available to pay for their school meal.
- C. Free Meal Benefit – Assistance for students from families with income at or below 130 percent of the poverty level.
- D. Full Pay Students – Students from families with incomes over 185 percent of poverty.

- E. Meal Account – An account that is set up by parents to deposit money in to make payments for their student’s school meals.
- F. Meal Charge – A debt or debit that is applied to a student’s meal account when the account balance reaches a zero balance and/or becomes negative.
- G. Parent – Any one of the following, recognized as the adult(s) legally responsible for the child or vulnerable adult:
 - 1. Biological Parent – A natural parent whose parental rights have not been terminated.
 - 2. Adoptive Parent – A parent who has legally adopted the student, and whose parental rights have not been terminated.
 - 3. Custodian – A person or an agency appointed by the court as the legal custodian of the student and granted parental rights and responsibilities.
 - 4. Guardian – A person who has been placed by the court in charge of the affairs of the student and granted parental rights and responsibilities.
 - 5. Caregiver – An adult resident of Howard County who exercises care, custody or control over the student, but who is neither the biological parent nor legal guardian as long as the person satisfies the requirements of the Education Article §7-101(c) (Informal Kinship Care).
 - 6. Foster Parent – An adult approved to care for a child who has been placed in their home by a state agency or a licensed child placement agency as provided by the Family Law Article, §5-507.
- H. Reduced-Price Meal Benefit – Assistance for students from families with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level. Students in households participating in WIC may also be eligible for reduced price meal benefit.

IV. Standards

- A. This policy and implementation procedures apply to students in all schools.
- B. All students will be treated with dignity and confidentiality in the serving line regarding meal accounts.
- C. Meals will not be taken away from a student once it is served.
- D. Second meals and a la carte purchases are prepaid or cash only.

- E. Parents will be contacted by Food and Nutrition Services or principal/designee for a student to receive an alternate meal after either:
 - 1. Three days of non-payment, or
 - 2. Steps have not been taken to apply for assistance, or
 - 3. The parent has not made appropriate payment arrangements.
- F. Students who do not have sufficient funds to pay for meals will be allowed total meal charges up to a designated dollar amount, which includes breakfast and lunch.
- G. Regular meals will resume when the charge balance is fully cleared and the meal account has a positive balance.
- H. The school and the Food and Nutrition Services will use all available resources to contact the parent to resolve issues in a timely manner.
- I. Parents will be encouraged to assume the responsibility of meal payments.
- J. Collection of meal charge balances owed at the end of the school year will follow HCPSS's procedures on student fees, fines and charges.
- K. Meal charges will not be permitted by adults.

V. Responsibilities

- A. The Superintendent/Designee is responsible for complying with this policy.
- B. Parents are responsible for meals purchased by their student(s) in the cafeteria.
- C. School staff will treat all students with dignity and confidentiality regarding meal accounts.

VI. Delegation of Authority

The Superintendent is authorized to develop appropriate procedures to implement this policy.

VII. References

- A. Legal
 - Maryland State Department of Education Memorandum SM 48-16 – Unpaid Meal Charges; Local Meal Policies; September 21, 2016.
 - USDA Memorandum SP 47-2016 – Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments; July 8, 2016.
 - Section 143 of the Healthy, Hungry-Free Kids Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-296; December 13, 2010) entitled “Review of Local Policies and Meal Charges and Provision of Alternate Meals.”

- B. Other Board Policies
 - Policy 1010 Discrimination
 - Policy 9050 Student Records
 - Policy 9090 Wellness Through Nutrition and Physical Activity
- C. Relevant Data Sources
- D. Other
 - Free and Reduced Lunch Program Application

VIII. History

ADOPTED: July 1, 2017

REVIEWED:

MODIFIED:

REVISED:

EFFECTIVE: July 1, 2017

I. Definitions

Within the context of these Implementation Procedures, the following definitions apply:

- A. Bad Debt – Debts which have been determined to be uncollectable and must be written off as an operating loss.
- B. Delinquent Debt – Unpaid meal charges are considered “delinquent debt” when payment is overdue, as defined by state or local policies. Delinquent debt is considered collectable if efforts are being made to collect it. Delinquent debt remains on the accounting documents until it is either collected or is determined to be uncollectable and written off. Unpaid meal charges may be carried over at the end of the school year as a delinquent debt and collection efforts may continue into the new school year
- C. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – Program (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) which provides food-purchasing assistance for low and no income people living in the United States.
- D. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) – Program (often referred to as "welfare") is one of the United States of America's federal assistance programs, providing cash assistance to indigent American families with dependent children through the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

II. General Guidelines for Meal Charges

- A. Payment for school meals is expected at the point of sale at the time of purchase.
- B. All students will be treated with dignity in the serving line regardless of their ability to pay for meals.
- C. No student will be denied a meal because of financial circumstances beyond a student’s control.
- D. Meals will not be taken away from a student once it is served.
- E. Students may be eligible for free meals if:
 - 1. The household income to household size ratio is within the free limits on the Federal Income Guidelines.

2. One member of the household is currently receiving assistance (benefits) from SNAP (Food Stamps) or TANF.
 3. The student is under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court.
 4. The student meets the definition of homeless, migrant or runaway.
 5. The student is enrolled in a federally-funded even start and head-starts.
- F. Student may be eligible for reduced-price meals if the household income to household size ratio is within the reduced-price limits on the Federal Income Guidelines.
- G. Alternate meals will be provided to full pay students after meal charges of sixteen dollars (\$16.00) have accumulated in the student's account and remain unpaid.
- H. Reduced-price eligible students will continue to receive full reimbursable meals instead of alternate meals if meal charges accumulate.
- I. No a la carte food items may be charged.
- J. Three (3) weeks prior to the last day of school any student who has a zero or negative balance will be provided an alternative meal.
- K. Parents will assume the responsibility of meal charges on delinquent accounts.

III. Guidelines for Full Pay Students

- A. Elementary School Students
1. Elementary School students will prepay or pay cash for all meals and a la carte purchases.
 2. Students will be allowed to charge a maximum of sixteen dollars (\$16.00) to their account after the balance reaches zero.
 3. After the meal charge limit of sixteen dollars (\$16.00) is reached, students will be provided an alternate meal. The cost of the alternate meal will be charged to the student's meal account at the alternate meal rate.
 4. Alternate meals will also be available for purchase by all students.
 5. If a student has reached the maximum amount allowed for charges, and payment has not been made, Food and Nutrition Services and/or the cafeteria manager will notify the principal/designee who will contact the parent of the student to arrange payment plans, and/or to discuss free and/or reduced eligibility options.

B. Middle and High School Students

1. Middle and High School students will prepay or pay cash for all meals and a la carte purchases.
2. Students will be allowed to charge at most sixteen dollars (\$16.00) to their account after the balance reaches zero.
3. After the meal charge limit of sixteen dollars (\$16.00) is reached, the student will be provided with an alternate meal. The cost of the alternate meal will be charged to the student's meal account at the alternate meal rate.
4. The alternate meal would also be available for purchase by all students.
5. If the student has reached the maximum amount allowed for charges, and payment has not been made, Food and Nutrition Services and/or the principal/designee will notify the student and contact the parent of the student to arrange payment plans, and/or to discuss free and/or reduced-price eligibility options.

IV. Guidelines for Free Meal Benefit Students

- A. Free status students will be allowed to receive a free breakfast and lunch each day.
- B. A la carte purchases must be prepaid or paid with cash.

V. Guidelines for Reduced-Price Meal Benefit Students

- A. Reduced-price status students will be allowed to charge a maximum of sixteen dollars (\$16.00) to their account after the balance reaches zero.
- B. Al la carte purchases must be prepaid or paid with cash.

VI. Adults

Adults (except for adult students) will not be permitted to incur meal charges.

VII. Parents

- A. Parents are responsible for meal payment to the food service program.
- B. No student is allowed a free or reduced price meal without a current approved application on file with Food and Nutrition Services.
- C. Families may submit, and Food and Nutrition Services and schools will accept, applications for free or reduced-price meals.

- D. If a student is without meal money on a consistent basis, the principal/designee will investigate the situation more closely and take further action as needed. If financial hardship exists, parents will be encouraged to apply for free or reduced-price lunches.
- E. Once approved for free or reduced-price school meals, a student's eligibility remains in effect for the duration of the school year and for 30 operating days into the following school year, or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever comes first.
- F. Parents who apply for free and reduced-price meal benefits are responsible for payment of all school meals and accumulated charges until approval is granted. Federal guidelines allow a maximum of ten (10) days to approve a new free and reduced-price meal application.
- G. Parents will receive a notification letter of a student's eligibility showing the effective date. If a notification letter is not received within ten (10) days after an application for free or reduced price meals is submitted, the parent should check with Food and Nutrition Services to see if the application has been received.
- H. If a family's income decreases at any time during the school year, an application for free or reduced price meals may be completed to determine eligibility.
- I. Notices of meal charges will be sent to parents at regular intervals during the school year until outstanding charges are paid in full.

VIII. Notifying and Collecting Outstanding Meal Charges:

- A. Food and Nutrition Services will send out low balance notices prior to students needing to charge meals. School system staff involved in the collection of delinquent debt for meals will ensure that their efforts do not have a negative impact on the student involved, and will instead focus primarily on adults in the household responsible for providing funds for meal purchases.
- B. Food and Nutrition Services, working with schools, will send notices home with students and follow up with a letter and/or a phone call to parents.
- C. Food and Nutrition Services will notify and/or work with school pupil personnel workers, school nurses, and other authorized staff members to understand the student and parent's situation and if a free or reduced-price meal application is needed. Unauthorized persons, such as parent volunteers, may not be used to follow up with payment reminders or debt collection efforts.
- D. Individual schools may set up accounts with parent teacher organizations or other groups to provide funds for students with meal charges. These accounts would be set up and administered by Food and Nutrition Services.

- E. All meal charge accounts will be settled by the end of the school year. Letters will be sent home to parents requesting in writing “Payment in Full” approximately two weeks before the last day of the school year for students whose accounts are in deficit. All charges not paid before the end of the school year will be carried forward into the next school year.

IX. Reclassifying Delinquent Debt as Bad Debt

- A. When it is determined that further collection efforts for delinquent debt are useless or too costly, the debt will be reclassified as “bad debt.”
- B. Bad debt will be written off and categorized as an operating loss which will be restored using non-federal funds.

X. Communication

- A. This policy will be provided in writing to all households at the start of each school year and to households that transfer to the school during the school year.
- B. The notification will be provided to households that transfer to the school during the school year.
- C. HCPSS will provide notification through public releases to local media and on school system websites.
- D. This Policy will be provided to HCPSS staff responsible for Policy enforcement, including food service professionals responsible for collecting payment for meals at the point of service, staff involved in the notification of families of low or negative balances, and staff involved in enforcing any other aspects of this Policy. School administrators, school social workers, school nurses, the homeless liaison, pupil personnel workers, and other staff members who assist students in need will also be informed of this Policy.

XI. History

ADOPTED: July 1, 2017
REVIEWED:
MODIFIED:
REVISED:
EFFECTIVE: July 1, 2017