Template - Meal Charge Policy/Procedure for [SFA Name]

Purpose -The purpose of this policy/procedure is to establish consistent procedures for the [enter your School Food Authority/supervisory union name] to provide meals to students who have insufficient funds in their school meal accounts and the collection of unpaid meal debt. Please reference USDA FNS memo SP 23-2017 Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP23-2017os.pdf>.

# General Statement of Policy/Procedure –

1. The [name of School Food Authority/supervisory union] recognizes proper nutrition is essential for adequate learning to occur and to establish lifelong, healthy eating habits while also working to maintain the financial integrity of the school food service program.
2. It is the policy/procedure of [name of School Food Authority/supervisory union] to offer all students high quality, healthy breakfasts and lunches, that meet the federal guidelines, at a reasonable cost, to ensure no student goes hungry.
3. Payments to student accounts are made by [indicate how the specific payment procedures, which may include sending a check to the school, online payments to student accounts, etc.]
4. Households may apply for free and reduced-price meals at any time during the school year. Meal applications are distributed to households [enter the process for distributing application packets – sent to households by mail prior to the first day of school, sent home with students on the first day of school, etc.] Households are encouraged to complete and return the applications as soon as possible. In addition, applications are available at the school office during regular business hours and online at [enter the school website]. If household size changes or income changes, households may re-apply for meal benefits any time during the school year.
   1. Households 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 10 operating days to approve a new application. No student is allowed a free or reduced-price meal without an approved application or direct certification information on file. Households will receive a notification letter of the student’s eligibility showing the effective date. If a notification letter is not received within 10 operating days, the household should check with the approving official at the school to see if the application has been received.
   2. Households who are receiving 3SquaresVT or Reach-Up benefits will receive a notification of eligibility letter based on Direct Certification from the school if the school has received information about your student(s). If your household receives these benefits and you have not received this letter from the school, the school has not received information regarding eligibility of your student(s), the household must contact the school immediately to provide current information.
   3. Free and reduced-price eligible students may receive a breakfast and a lunch each day at no charge.
   4. A la carte items, such as a separate carton of milk or a second entrée, are not allowed to be charged.

# Meal Charge Policy/Procedure –

1. If the student account has insufficient funds to pay for breakfast and/or lunch meals, [the SFA must identify how it will handle situations where paid-status students do not have money in their accounts or in hand to cover the cost of the meal at the time of service.]

(The policy/procedure may allow students to charge meals, the school to offer alternate meals, to impose limits on charges, or to neither allow charges nor to offer alternate meals. The SFA may have different options for different grade groups.)

*The following options may be considered:*

* Students in grades \_\_\_ - \_\_\_ will be allowed to charge up to (insert dollar amount)
* Students in elementary school will always be provided a meal.
* An alternate meal of (indicate type of meal {Cheese sandwich, PB & J, etc.} which meets the meal pattern requirements will be offered to the students with a negative account balance.
* A substitute meal consisting of (indicate food item(s) offered PB & J and milk) will be offered at lunch to (identify grade groups) to students with a negative account balance.
* If the meal account is over-drawn, a student will be allowed to charge (identify number) of (identify breakfast and/or lunch) meals.
* All students will be provided a meal regardless of their meal account status.
* All negative balances must be paid prior to the end of the school year. Any remaining balances will be carried over to the next school year.

1. Free and reduced-price eligible students will always be provided a meal regardless of unpaid student accounts.
2. A student eligible for paid meals who has ‘cash in hand’ at the time of meal service will be provided a meal regardless of unpaid student accounts. The ‘cash in hand’ will not be applied to past due accounts.
3. Students with an overdrawn account are not allowed to charge a la carte items. *(Recommended best practice is to prohibit any a la carte items to be charged.)*

# Account Status Notifications –

* 1. Households are strongly encouraged to keep sufficient funds in the student accounts to cover weekly meal purchases. The [School Food Authority name] will notify each household of account balances by [indicate how households will be notified of account balances]. The following options may be considered for inclusion in the policy/procedure.
* The Food Service Program will send a weekly, bi-weekly, monthly email or notice to households.
* Households can check their account balances online via (enter system name).
* Households may contact the Food Service Director/Manager at (enter phone number and e-mail address).
* Students will be given a verbal reminder or written notice in the food service line.
  1. The household will be notified when the student account balance has reached [enter the dollar amount] by [method of notification]. *The following options may be considered for inclusion in the policy/procedure. Notification methods may be different depending on grade groups.*
* Households will be notified by email when the student account reaches the minimum balance of $5.00/$10.00 or less.
* An email reminder will be sent to households once the student account reaches $0.
* Weekly emails will be sent to households whose students have a negative account balance.
* A second request for payment will be sent after 5 days if the household has not responded to the first request.
* A letter is sent to households via the U.S. Mail requesting payment.
* Robocalls will be used to contact households whose student accounts have reached the minimum balance or have a negative balance.
* An invoice will be sent via certified mail, return receipt requested.

# Collection of Unpaid Meal Debt –

When the student balance is [indicate the dollar amount], the following collection activities will be followed:

* 1. Elementary School: [Indicate actions to be taken]
  2. Middle School: [Indicate actions to be taken]
  3. High School: [Indicate actions to be taken]

*The following options might be included in this policy/procedure.*

* The Food Service Manager/Director (or designated staff) will contact the household request payment.
* The Food Service Manager/Director will contact the building principal if no payment is received.
* The building principal will contact the household to discuss the requirement of the household to provide meals for the student.
* The building principal may contact the local social services office if the household refuses to provide meals or pay for student meals.
* A certified letter will be sent to the household notifying them that the debt will be turned over to a collection agency if not paid by (specify date).
* All funds owed to the food service program will be paid in full on the last day of school.
* Checks returned with insufficient funds will follow the district’s policy.

Reviewed by:

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Approved by:

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| Superintendent Signature |  | Printed Name |  | Date |
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| SFA Representative Signature |  | Printed Name |  | Date |