

Date Issued \_\_\_\_\_

Effective Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **School District Meal Charge Policy**

### **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.

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.

### **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, and/or Food Service Director: 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 school district website.
- 4.** SFAs may limit the amount of funds that a student can use daily for a la carte purchases. If a student is in a negative balance for school food account he/she are not allowed to purchase a la carte items.
- 5.** Elementary students: Negative account balance notices will be placed in teacher's mail boxes and distributed to students to be sent home. This can occur daily, weekly, and/or monthly.
  - a. Calls on delinquent accounts are made on a daily, weekly, and/or monthly 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: Negative account balance notices will be placed in teacher's mail boxes and distributed to students to be sent home. This can occur daily, weekly, and/or monthly.
  - a. Calls on delinquent accounts are made on a daily, weekly, and/or monthly 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: Negative account balance notices will be placed in teacher's mail boxes and distributed to students to be sent home. This can occur daily, weekly, and/or monthly. Students may also be given slips directly if warranted.

a. Calls on delinquent accounts are made on a daily, weekly, and/or monthly 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.

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.** Alternate Meal: Denying meals is not allowed and students with negative account balances will be provided the cheapest alternate meal to be given in a manner that prevents embarrassment to the child in the meal service line.

a. Hillsboro ISD has an alternative meal procedure in place in the event that students have a negative balance on their meal accounts. All grades will be allowed to charge up to \$15.00 before receiving an alternative meal. Once the account reaches the above total, students will begin receiving an alternative meal for breakfast and/or lunch until the account is paid.

b. 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.** Long-term payment plans for households struggling to pay back a negative balance are subject to individual circumstances. In these circumstances 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. 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."