

**ONSLow COUNTY SCHOOLS  
SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

**TITLE:       COLLECTION OF SCHOOL NUTRITION MEAL CHARGES**

The Onslow County School System is committed to providing nutritious meals at affordable prices through the efforts of the School Nutrition Department. In order to maintain the lowest meal prices possible, all those families who qualify to pay either full or reduced price for student meals should make complete payment for meals purchased. These program guidelines are written for the purpose of encouraging payment to the school system by those who are classified as having the ability to pay. Nothing within these guidelines should be construed to change the USDA and North Carolina approved School Nutrition Program. All those who qualify for free or reduced-price meal benefits will be served in accordance with program regulations.

Onslow County Schools allows students to charge meals in elementary, and middle school. **High school students may charge up to 5 meals or \$11.25. Once a student charges up to \$11.25, no additional charges will be allowed.** In order to standardize the practice of meal charges and collections among all the cafeterias within the county, these guidelines are placed into effect.

**I.       Information Distributed to Parents/Guardians and Students**

To explain the services and operations of the Onslow County Schools Nutrition Program, a School Nutrition Package is given to every student within the Onslow County Schools upon their entrance into the school system during a given school year. The School Nutrition Package will contain the following information:

1. General information about meals served
2. Snack items available
3. Costs for meals
4. Methods of payment for meals including online services
5. An explanation of the free and reduced-price meal program
6. An application for free or reduced-price meal benefits

Principals shall be responsible for the distribution of this package to every student at the start of each school year. All information provided to parents/guardians shall be made available on the school system website at [www.onslow.k12.nc.us](http://www.onslow.k12.nc.us). In addition, information on the School Nutrition Program, Free and Reduced Meal Program, and meal charge collections shall be included in the district-wide student handbook.

**II.       Reduced Paying Students Get Free Breakfasts at All Grade Levels**

In accordance with the State School Breakfast Program, students that are approved for reduced meal status are eligible for free breakfast. Parents/Guardians are encouraged to utilize this program where available. Please note that the schools eligible to participate in the program are authorized by the State of North Carolina.

### **III. Ability To Charge**

Elementary school students (grades K-5), and middle school (grades 6-8) will be permitted to charge meals. High school students (grades 9 – 12) will be allowed to charge up to \$11.25, or 5 meals. Adults (including visitors and staff members) will not be permitted to charge meals. Meal charge data collected during the school year will be evaluated to determine if programmatic changes should be made.

### **IV. Notice of Balances and Meal Charges to Students**

School Nutrition Cashiers can inform the student if the student's account balance is low. If the student asks how much money is in the account, the cashier can inform them of the amount.

The school system recognizes that payment for meals received by students is the responsibility of the parents/guardians of the student. Therefore, communication regarding low balances and unpaid charges owed by the student will be directed toward the parents/guardians.

### **V. Notice of Meal Charges to the Parent/Guardian**

Parents/guardians of students who cannot afford to pay for meals served should apply for meal benefits under the free or reduced-price meal program offered within the Onslow County School System. Applications for free or reduced-price meal benefits will be processed in a timely manner once received in their entirety by the school system. Charges for meals will accumulate in accordance with the guidelines of the program.

The Onslow County School System will utilize a program of collections for meal charges. This program is necessary to provide meals at the lowest price possible for all the students served by the Onslow County Schools School Nutrition Program. The collections program ensures that all persons with the ability to pay for meals do, in fact, pay for meals purchased.

School Nutrition shall maintain, at no charge to the parent, a secure, online account service which allows parents to check account balances online and to make credit/debit card payments online. A third-party fee is charged for the convenience of making online payments.

Nothing in these guidelines shall prohibit School Nutrition Managers or School Administrators from contacting parents/guardians concerning meal charges owed. School Nutrition Managers and School Administrators are encouraged to use their best judgment in contacting parents/guardians at any time throughout the year for any amount owed.

**VI. Parental/Guardian Choice in the School Nutrition Program**

At any time they desire, parents/guardians may provide written special instructions to the School Nutrition Program concerning their account preferences for their children. Parents/guardians may elect to restrict purchases of snacks or restrict food charges by students.

**VII. Employee/Adult Charges**

All employees nor other adults will be permitted to charge for meals or individual food items. Parents or staff are not allowed to use a student’s prepaid account to make purchases.

**VIII. Progressive Meal Charge Collections Program**

The following procedures apply to both elementary school and middle school meal charges. The procedures shall be uniformly applied to all elementary and middle school sites.

Step	Dollar Thresholds	Action Taken
1	Any Threshold	Personal contact can be made by the CN Manager or school staff to inform parents/guardians of the School’s account balance.
2	Prepaid Balances \$5.00 or less	Cashiers will notify the student at the point of sale <b>each day</b> to let their parents know that their balance is low.
2	Any Negative Balance	The School Nutrition Manager sends a weekly standard written charge notice home via the student. The notice contains information on the student’s account balance, the meal charge collections program, and the free or reduced meal program. The School Nutrition Director sends a weekly call out to all parents with unpaid balances on their account. School Administration is notified on a monthly basis of the students with unpaid balances. The Principal may contact the parents and/or review the student’s situation and take the appropriate actions as identified in this guideline.
3	Negative Balances greater than \$50.00	Late spring, the Board Attorney sends a letter to the parents requesting payment for the unpaid lunch charges. Additional actions may be taken in accordance with the guideline.

**IX. Emergency Application for Free or Reduced Meals**

Local school officials may complete an application for a child known to be eligible for meal benefits if the household has not applied. When exercising this option, the school official must complete an application on behalf of the child based on the household size and income information or Other Source Categorical Eligibility status known to the official. The source of the information must be noted on the application. Names of household members, the last four digits of the Social Security Number, and the signature of an adult household member need not be secured. These applications are excluded from verification. However, the household must be notified that the child has been certified to receive free or reduced price benefits. This option is intended for limited use in individual situations and must not be used to make eligibility determinations for categories or groups of children.

**X. Referral to Social Worker**

If, in the opinion of the Principal the financial position of a family warrants referral to a social worker, the Principal may assign a social worker to make contact with a family. The social worker may provide information on any/all federal, state, or local assistance services including the USDA free or reduced meal program.

**XI. Additional Collection Methods**

Nothing within this document shall prohibit the school system from using any such additional methods of collection as are allowed by law to include, but not limited to: referral to the school system attorney, referral to a collections agency, or the pursuit of legal remedies through the North Carolina Judicial System. Where such other collection efforts are pursued, the cost of collections shall be sought from the parent/guardian.

**XII. Modification of Guidelines**

The Onslow County School System shall modify these guidelines as necessary to best meet the needs of the school system. Modifications to the guidelines shall be made available on the school system website.

**XIII. Nondiscrimination**

In accordance with Federal Law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination, write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 or (202) 720-6382 (TTY), USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.