

CHILD NUTRITION MEAL CHARGE POLICY

The New Hanover County School System (NHCS) recognized the importance of good nutrition and strives to take all reasonable steps to ensure students have access to school meals. However, to be in compliance with federal requirements, the Child Nutrition Program cannot incur a loss due to charges of food and beverages by customers. Therefore, the purpose of this Policy is to establish consistent meal account procedures throughout the district regarding charges and collection of charges.

At the beginning of the school year, information concerning eligibility for free or reduced meals will be distributed and communicated, by the administration of each school not eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) plan, to all students' parents/legal guardians. This information shall also be distributed and communicated when a new student transfers to a school that is not eligible for the CEP plan. The school social worker and/or data manager shall assist the school administration in identifying students eligible for free or reduced meals as necessary.

Parents/legal guardians who wish to apply for free or reduced meals must complete an application each year, or Direct Certification. The parent/legal guardian of any NHCS student may submit an application at any time. Application forms will be sent home at the beginning of the school year and are also available in each school's cafeteria, main office, or on the [NHCS web site](#).

Applicants are responsible to pay for meals until a free or reduced application is completed and approved.

All students who do not qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch are expected to pay for school meals at the time of purchase. Pre-paid meal plan is encouraged. Efforts should be made by the school system and the individual schools to encourage students and parents to participate in the pre-paid meal plan as an alternative to the purchasing of meals on a daily basis in order to reduce the incidence of students forgetting or losing their meal money. Student's meal plan account history shall be available to parents/legal guardians upon request.

Students may purchase a la carte items, at individual prices, if they do not have an outstanding charge balance on their account.

If a student is without meal money on a consistent basis, the principal, and their social worker and/or data manager shall assist the Child Nutrition Department in investigating the situation more closely, including contacting the parent/guardian and/or encouraging the parent/guardian to seek additional assistance (i.e. Free and Reduced Lunch Application). The Child Nutrition Department shall report student meal charge balances to principals on a regular basis.

The Child Nutrition Department shall also assist in the collection process by working with student support services to help identify children that are eligible for assistance. Child Nutrition shall send out weekly reminders, through a call center, to parents notifying them of their account balance.

The accounts for students who charge a meal should be paid in full within 30 days. All charges shall be monitored and shall be turned over to a collection agency at the point the account is deemed uncollectable. The collection agency, selected and approved by the Superintendent or designee, shall work with the student's family to collect the amount owed to the system.

Federal policy prohibits the withholding of meals from a student as a form of discipline; therefore, New Hanover County students shall not be deprived a meal nor be served a differentiated meal (i.e. peanut butter/jelly or cheese sandwich) due to forgotten or lost meal money.

Federal law prohibits the charging of adult meals.

LEGAL REF: 2 CFR 200.426

Adopted: 09/03/13

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