

UNPAID MEAL CHARGE

The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs are integral in ensuring that students have access to nutritious meals to support their academic success. It is also imperative to protect the financial stability of school nutrition program.

The purpose of this policy is to address the need for School Food Authorities (SFA) 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 alternated 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.

You can find more information about this USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) requirements at: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/unpaid-meal-charges>.

This policy will establish consistent meal account procedures throughout the school division. The goals of this policy are:

- To treat all students with dignity in the serving line regarding meal accounts
- To support positive situations with division staff, division business policies, student and parent/guardian to the maximum extent possible
- To establish policies that are age appropriate
- To establish a consistent district policy regarding charges and collection charges.

This policy prohibits school board employees from requiring a student who cannot pay for a meal at school or who owes a school meal debt to do chores or other work to pay for such meals or wear a wristband or hand stamp; and requires school board employees to direct any communication relating to school meal debt to the student's parent. Such policy may permit such communication to be made by a letter addressed to the parent to be sent home with the student.

Requirement:

- The first day of school in September of each year, parents should send a lunch or lunch money with their child unless they are free or reduced from the year before. They will have 30 days from the time school starts to reapply for free or reduced meals. If a student is paid and the parent is sending in an application, the parent is still responsible for debt incurred on the account until the application is processed.

- A free and reduced application must be turned in each school year. After the first 30 days, the students who qualified the year before will go to paid. If an application qualifies the student for free, the charged meals will still be the responsibility of the parent.
- Grades 8 – 12 are not allowed to charge. We will offer a reimbursable alternate meal two times to students in grades 8 – 12. Pre-K through 7th grade may follow the following charge policy.
- The child, K-7, will only be allowed to charge up to two times and then an alternate breakfast and lunch will be provided, and the charges are still to be paid by the parent/guardian.
- An alternate breakfast and lunch can only be allowed two times. An alternate meal will consist of a reimbursable breakfast fruit, grain and milk. An alternate reimbursable lunch of cheese sandwich, vegetable, fruit and milk. If the charges continue and all other means to communicate with parents do not work, social services will be contacted.
- Students who qualify for a free meal will not be denied a reimbursable meal even if they owe money on their account. They will not be allowed to charge snacks. Money brought in to buy snacks when a debt is owed needs to clear up the debt owed first before snacks can be bought.
- Students who have money to pay for a reduced-price or full price meal at the time of service must be provided a meal. If the student intended to use the money for that day's meal, the SFA will not use the money to repay a negative balance or other unpaid meal charge debt.
- Parents may contact our Food and Nutrition office to block the child/ren's account to say NO CHARGES ALLOWED. The parent would not be responsible for any charges if the account is flagged.
- My School Bucks is downloaded to the students account at 5:15 a.m, 10:00 am and 2:45 p.m. If a parent applies a payment after 5:15 a.m. and the parent sends in their receipt to the cafeteria; we can verify that there will be money on the account at the 10:15 download, we will accept that and allow the child/ren to have breakfast.
- Beginning the second week in May we will no longer allow any charges. This will be posted on our Cafeteria and My School Bucks Websites. Signs will be posted in each cafeteria.
- All refund requests over \$5.00 will need to be refunded through our accounts payable department. Refund requests need to be submitted in writing, e-mail or refund form. A refund form is located on the school district's web site under cafeteria. Parents that have students graduating may request a refund or a transfer of funds to another child's account in our district. Families that are not approved for free or reduced-price meals may donate the funds remaining in their account rather than receiving a refund when their child leaves the school. Please contact the Food & Nutrition Department at 804-733-2710.
- The written meal charge policy will be communicated to the household by the beginning of the school year through distribution of required annual notifications and student back to school packets.

- School Nutrition Program (SNP) staff will receive training on meal charge policy and a record of the training will be maintained as part of the professional development portfolio.
- Documentation of the communication and training plan will be maintained for the Federal Program Administrative Review.
- Any communication of a student's debt will be directed to the parent or guardian. A letter addressed to the parent and sent home with the student is an acceptable form of communication.

Notification to the Household of Low or Negative Balance in Student Cafeteria Account:

- Parent/Guardians can log onto Prince George County Schools/Cafeteria and download the free MySchoolBucks App onto their phone or can sign up at MySchoolBucks.com. This tool will allow parents to place money on their child/rens meal account by debit or credit card. This program can have scheduled automatic payments and low balance notifications. A small service fee is assessed for this service. Parents can view account balances and meal purchases free of charge.
- School Nutrition will send phone messages to parents five times a week, Monday through Friday at 6:00 p.m. to inform parents of low or negative balances. Cashiers will also give students an envelope addressed to the parents with a note reminding that their balance is low and needs to send money. Such policy may permit such communication to be made by a letter addressed to the parent to be sent home with the student.
- Letters will be sent home during the month of May to collect all outstanding charges.

Collection Procedures of Delinquent Meal Charge Debt:

Parents are encouraged to pay any balances owed by the end of each school year.

- Letters will go home to parents of students who owe money and phone calls will be made by the School Nutrition Coordinator prior to notifying the Director of Budget and Finance.
- Bad debt is defined as delinquent debt that is deemed uncollectible at the end of the school year. Bad debt is unallowable in the Food & Nutrition Department and cannot be carried over to the next school year. Funds resulting from bad debt cannot be recovered using School Nutrition funds and must be offset by non-federal sources.

Adopted: June 12, 2017

Revised: July 16, 2018 (administratively); September 10, 2018

Legal Ref: 2 CFR Part 200 Section 143 of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.