

PROCEDURE TITLE: Meal Charges		
ADOPTION/EFFECTIVE DATE:	MOST RECENTLY AMENDED:	MOST RECENTLY REAFFIRMED:
POLICY/PROCEDURE MANUAL SUMMARY CATEGORY: BUSINESS SERVICES		

I. PURPOSE & SCOPE

The Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) Department of Food and Nutrition Services (DFNS) operates as a self-supported program funded through meal payments and federal reimbursements.

This procedure outlines expectations for student meal charging, communication, debt prevention, donations, and end-of-year reconciliation.

Applies to all HCPS schools, DFNS staff, Business Services, school administration, and families.

II. STUDENT MEAL ACCOUNTS

1. Each student is assigned a secure meal account accessed with a unique PIN.
2. Legal guardians are responsible for all meal charges made to the student account.
3. Payments may be made in cash at school or through the online payment system.
4. All meal account balances – positive or negative – roll over annually.
5. Parents/guardians may submit requests to restrict purchases or prohibit meal charges; restrictions must be renewed each school year.

III. NOTIFICATIONS & PREVENTION STRATEGIES

To minimize unpaid meal debt and ensure families receive timely information:

1. DFNS maintains the negative-balance list that is uploaded into the HCPS communication system for weekly parent/guardian outreach.
2. Weekly negative-balance notifications (phone, text, or email) are sent to parents/guardians only.
3. Additional optional alerts may be set by families in the online payment system.
4. School administration and Pupil Personnel Workers (PPWs) may engage in outreach for persistent or chronic meal debt.

IV. FREE & REDUCED-PRICE MEALS

1. HCPS provides no-cost meals based on federal eligibility guidelines; Maryland covers the cost of reduced-price meals.
2. A new application is required annually.
3. Eligibility from the prior year carries over for the first 30 school days.

4. Applications may be submitted anytime beginning July 1, online or via paper forms available at schools.
5. DFNS also certifies eligible students through Direct Certification.
6. Parents/guardians receive written notice of approval or denial via USPS mail or email.

V. MEAL CHARGING PROCEDURES

HCPS ensures that all students receive equitable access to school meals.

Students will always receive a complete reimbursable meal regardless of their meal account balance.

Schools may not deny, discard, or replace a meal because of unpaid charges. This reflects statewide requirements that ensure school systems provide consistent, non-punitive access to meals for all students.

1. Students may charge one complete breakfast and one complete lunch per school day.
2. HCPS does not apply a cap to the total balance that may accrue.
3. A la carte items cannot be charged and may not be purchased when an account carries a negative balance.
4. HCPS does not offer alternative meals; all students receive the standard reimbursable meal.
5. Charging practices are consistent across all grade levels.

VI. RESTRICTIONS ON COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

Schools may not deny, discard, or replace a meal due to unpaid charges. This reflects statewide requirements that ensure school systems provide consistent, non-punitive access to meals for all students.

Prohibited actions include:

1. Discussing unpaid meal debt with students.
2. Using wristbands, stamps, stickers, or other identifiers.
3. Assigning chores or tasks related to meal debt.
4. Withholding meals or discarding meals already served.
5. Restricting a student from school records or extracurricular activities.

VII. REFUNDS, TRANSFERS, AND DONATIONS

1. Refunds for graduating or withdrawing students may be requested using the Student Meal Account Balance Request Form or by contacting DFNS.
2. Families may request funds be transferred between student accounts.
3. Families may donate remaining balances to assist in offsetting unpaid student debt.
4. Unclaimed funds remain available for one school year; afterward, balances become an asset of the school meal program.

UNPAID DEBT PROCEDURES

HCPS follows standard business and legal practices to recover unpaid meal charges.

1. DFNS monitors outstanding balances, coordinates communication with families, and refers persistent unpaid debt to the Business Services Department as needed.
2. Debt may be classified as uncollectible when Business Services determines further collection is impractical or cost-prohibitive.
3. DFNS prioritizes supporting families by encouraging and assisting with free/reduced-price meal applications and connecting them with community resources.
4. Families experiencing hardship are encouraged to apply for free or reduced-price meal benefits at any time during the school year. DFNS and school staff will aid with the application process as needed.

VIII. END-OF-YEAR RECONCILIATION

At the close of each fiscal year, HCPS completes a structured reconciliation process to ensure accurate management of meal account balances.

Identification & Notification

1. The list of students with outstanding balances is shared with the Business Services Department at the end of each school year.
2. Families are notified of any outstanding charges and reminded of available support options.

Classification of Uncollectible Debt

The HCPS Business Services Department evaluates the outstanding debt list and designates accounts as uncollectible when appropriate.

Application of Donations

1. Donations may be made at any time by families, community members, businesses, or organizations.
2. Donations may be designated for:
 - A specific student, or
 - A specific school, or
 - Districtwide
3. When donations are designated for a specific school or districtwide, DFNS applies the funds using the following priority order:
 - Free and reduced-price eligible students first
 - Applied from highest grade level downward
4. DFNS applies all donations once received and deposited.
5. A transaction note is added to each student account documenting the application of donated funds for auditing and compliance purposes.

Documentation Requirements

DFNS records all donation transactions and maintains supporting documentation as required for internal controls, auditing, and compliance.

IX. EMPLOYEE & ADULT ACCOUNTS

1. Permanent HCPS employees may establish meal accounts and add funds at any time.
2. Substitute and contracted employees must pay with cash at the time of purchase.
3. Permanent employees may charge up to \$5.00 for their account. No additional purchases are permitted until the outstanding balance is repaid.
4. Employees receive automated notifications like student account alerts.

X. COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS & DONATIONS

HCPS welcomes community support to help ensure all students receive nutritious meals regardless of financial circumstances.

1. Families, community organizations, local businesses, and charitable groups may contribute to student meal debt relief at any time.
2. Donations may be directed toward individual students, specific schools, or districtwide support.
3. All contributions are applied in accordance with DFNS procedures to ensure fair, consistent, and equitable distribution.

XI. PROCEDURE NOTIFICATION

This procedure will be posted on both the HCPS and DFNS websites and made **available** to students and families

Approved By:



**Dyann R. Mack, Ed. D., Interim Superintendent
Board of Education of Harford County**

Procedure Action Dates					
ACTION		DATE	ACTION		DATE
Adopted		4/4/17	Revised		3/13/26

Responsibility for Procedure Maintenance & References	
LAST EDITOR/DRAFTER NAME: Deborah Judd	JOB POSITION OF LAST EDITOR/DRAFTER: Assistant Superintendent for Business Services
PERSON RESPONSIBLE: Deborah Judd	JOB POSITION OF PERSON RESPONSIBLE: Assistant Superintendent for Business Services
DESIGNEE NAME:	DESIGNEE POSITION:

LEGAL REFERENCES¹

- 1. Healthy and Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, 42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.**
- 2. Senate Bill 760 (Chapter 581) - Public Schools – Student Meal Programs and Policies**

¹ All references are to specific federal or Maryland statutes or regulations. References are provided for convenience and informational purposes only and are not to be considered as exhaustive or as precluding Harford County Public Schools from relying upon any other statutes or regulations in support of a policy.