

Revised and Adopted: 6-26-2025

# STEAM Academy

## 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.

This requirement is referred to a “policy,” but whether this is referred to as a “policy” or “standard practice” is at the discretion of the SFA. Regardless of terminology used, 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.

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

### 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:~~

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students receive healthy and nutritious meals through the school district’s nutrition program and that school district employees, families, and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding meal charges. The policy of the school district is to provide meals to students in a respectful manner and to maintain the dignity of students by prohibiting lunch shaming or otherwise ostracizing the student. The policy seeks to allow students to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day and minimize identification of students with insufficient funds to pay for a la carte items or second meals as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program. 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: Responsible for maintaining charge records and notifying the student's parent/guardian.
- The Parent/Guardian: Immediate payment

### **IV. PAYMENT OF MEALS**

- A. If STEAM Academy participates in the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch program and has an Identified Student Percentage below the federal percentage determined for all meals to be reimbursed at the free rate via the Community Eligibility Provision must participate in the free school meals program.
- B. A school that participates in the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch program and has an Identified Student Percentage at or above the federal percentage determined for all meals to be reimbursed at the free rate must participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision in order to participate in the free school meals program.
- C. Each school that participates in the free school meals program must:
  - (1) participate in the United States Department of Agriculture School Breakfast Program and the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program; and
  - (2) provide to all students at no cost up to two federally reimbursable meals per school day, with a maximum of one free breakfast and one free lunch.
- D. Once a meal has been placed on a student's tray or otherwise served to a student, the meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meals balance.
- E. A student who has been determined eligible for free and reduced-price lunch must always be served a reimbursable meal even if the student has an outstanding debt.
- F. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item.
- G. If a parent or guardian chooses to send in one payment that is to be divided

between sibling accounts, the parent or guardian must specify how the funds are to be distributed to the students' accounts. Funds may not be transferred between sibling accounts unless written permission is received from the parent or guardian.

## **V. ADMINISTRATION UNPAID MEAL CHARGES**

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 pay for meals at the bill date 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 Food Service Website.
4. **Elementary students:** overdue slips will be attached to the student's information and sent to the student's classroom to be handed out to the student by the teacher.
  - a. Calls on delinquent accounts are made on a daily 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.

## **VI. COMMUNICATION OF POLICY**

- A. This policy and any pertinent supporting information shall be provided in writing (i.e., mail, email, back-to-school packet, student handbook, etc.) to:
  1. all households at or before the start of each school year;
  2. students and families who transfer into STEAM Academy, at the time of enrollment;
  3. and all STEAM Academy personnel who are responsible for enforcing this policy.
- B. STEAM Academy will post this policy on the school's website, or the website of the organization where the meal is served, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.
- C. If STEAM Academy contracts with a third party for its meal services, it will provide the vendor with its school meals policy. STEAM Academy will ensure that any third-party provider with whom the school district enters into either aboriginal or modified contract after July 1, 2021, adheres to the school district's school meals policy

*Legal References:*

*Minn. Stat. § 123B.37 (Prohibited Fees)*

*Minn. Stat. § 124D.111 (School Meals Policies; Lunch Aid; Food Service Accounting)*

*42 U.S.C. § 1751 et seq. (Healthy and Hunger-Free Kids Act)*

*7 C.F.R. § 210 et seq. (School Lunch Program Regulations)*

*7 C.F.R. § 220.8 (School Breakfast Program Regulations)*

*USDA Policy Memorandum SP 46-2016, Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies (2016)*

*USDA Policy Memorandum SP 47-2016, Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments (2016)*

*USDA Policy Memorandum SP 23-2017, Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A*