



## Meal Program and Meal Charge Policy

### MEAL PROGRAM

Sonoran Schools participates in the National School Lunch Program. It is the policy of Sonoran Schools that all parents/guardians of all children in attendance at all Sonoran Schools participating in this federal school meal service program are annually informed of the availability of reimbursable school meals and are provided information about applying for free or reduced price meals.

Sonoran Schools will annually provide each family with a paper application for free and reduced lunch and instructions for how to complete the application. Families will also be reminded that families who previously did not qualify for free or reduced lunch but experience a change in financial circumstance during the school year can complete and submit an application at any time during the school year.

A student's eligibility for free or reduced lunch will apply to the current school year and to the first thirty (30) days of the next school year, or until a new eligibility determination is made in the next school year, whichever comes first.

### MEAL CHARGE POLICY

All school food authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and/or School Breakfast Program (SBP) are required to have, and clearly communicate annually, a meal charge policy. The meal charge policy addresses children who are participating at the reduced price or paid rate but do not have money, in their pre-paid account or in hand, at the time of service, to cover the cost of the meal. *\*The meal charge policy does not apply to Sonoran Science Academy-Phoenix which participates in the Community Eligibility Provision.*

### PURPOSE

The purpose of the Meal Charge Policy is to establish consistent meal account procedures at all Sonoran Schools with the goals of:

- Treating all students in the serving line with dignity
- Promoting positive interactions between students, parents/guardians, vendors, and staff
- Encouraging the parent/guardian to be responsible for meal payments and to promote self-responsibility of the student
- Ensuring clear understanding of the importance of pre-ordering and paying for meals, and the process for doing so
- Informing parents/guardians of the policy for collecting unpaid meal charges
- Ensuring all staff members directly or indirectly involved in the Meal Program understand the policies and procedures for the Meal Program, Meal Charges, and Unpaid Meal Charges.





## POLICY NOTIFICATION

*Families:* The Meal Charge Policy will be communicated annually, in writing, with all families. **In writing** means a paper copy will be given to each family. **Annually** means once a year, no earlier than July 1<sup>st</sup>, but prior to the start of school or prior to the start of meal service. Sonoran Schools will achieve this by including this policy document with the application, and instructions for applying, for free and reduced price school meals. Families transferring in during the school year will receive this policy in their new student packet. In addition, this policy will be posted in each school's front office and on each school's website.

*Staff:* A copy of the Meal Charge Policy will be provided annually to all staff directly, or indirectly, involved with the school's Meal Program.

## MEAL AVAILABILITY, ORDERING, COST, AND PAYMENT

All Sonoran Schools contract with a third-party, state-approved vendor, to prepare, deliver, and serve a nutritious, hot lunch to students daily, on regular school days and early out days. Lunch is not served on half days.

Sonoran Schools utilizes a pre-order, pre-payment system that requires parents/guardians to pre-order lunches, online, monthly, in advance, using: [sonoranschools.boonli.com](http://sonoranschools.boonli.com) The window for ordering for the month ahead will open on the 1st of each month and close on the 25th of each month (e.g. order window opens on September 1st and closes on September 25th for October lunches). A pre-payment system greatly reduces any opportunity for free and reduced lunch students to be identified, as such, by peers and others. Payment may be made online, or by bringing a check to, or using a credit card in, the front office.

The cost for hot lunch at paragon Science Academy, Sonoran Science Academy Davis-Monthan, Sonoran Science Academy-East, Sonoran Science Academy-Peoria, and Sonoran Science Academy- Tucson is \$3.25. The reduced lunch cost at all schools is \$0.40.

Sonoran Schools does not refuse any student a meal but, as meals are pre-ordered, in advance, a very limited number of meals may be available (through student absence, for instance) for a student who requests a meal but who did not order one. Therefore, a meal cannot be guaranteed. The family of a student who requests and receives a meal that was not ordered and paid for in advance will be notified that a meal was consumed and asked for payment.

The pre-payment system utilized by the school must ensure reduced-price meals are received or that funds for reduced-price meals not received are carried over.

## CREDIT BALANCES

At the end of the school year, if a credit balance exists for a family paying full price for meals, the parent/guardian will be asked if they wish to:

- carry the balance over to the new school year





- donate the balance to supporting the free and reduced lunch program
- receive a refund.

If a student leaves during the school year and a credit balance exists for a family paying full price for meals, the school will attempt to reach the family and ask if they wish to:

- donate the balance to supporting the free and reduced lunch program
- receive a refund.

Any credit balance for a family receiving reduced lunch benefits must be refunded to the family.

### **UNPAID MEAL CHARGES**

Sonoran Schools is committed to ensuring efforts to recover unpaid meal charges do not have a negative impact on the students involved. A parent/guardian whose student generates a negative balance will be contacted, made aware of the balance, and asked for payment. The parent/guardian will also be asked to consider applying for the free and reduced meal program.

### **Delinquent debt**

Unpaid meal charges are called ‘delinquent debt’. The school will notify the parent/guardian of delinquent debt when an account is \$60 in arrears. The school will allow five (5) business days from the date the parent/guardian was notified of the debt for the parent/guardian to bring the account back into good standing or contact the school to arrange a payment plan. Debt remains classified as delinquent as long as it is considered collectable and efforts are being made to collect it. Delinquent debt may be carried over to the next school year and collection efforts may continue. A long-term payment plan may be continued and pursued by the school in the event the student leaves/changes schools.

### **Bad debt**

When the school determines further collection efforts for delinquent debt are useless or too costly, the debt must be reclassified as “bad debt.”

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

### **SOURCES USED:**

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/child-nutrition-programs>

USAD document SP 23-2017: Unpaid Meal Charges Guidance and Q and As

USDA document SP 46-2016: Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charges

USDA document SP 47-2016: Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments

USAD Local Charge Policy Training Template ppt. – sourced from [www.azed.gov/hns/nslp/rm/](http://www.azed.gov/hns/nslp/rm/)

