

The Potter's House Unpaid Meal Charges Policy

The Potter's House Food Service Program recognizes that adequate nutrition is essential to students' mental, physical and academic growth. All children (grades K-12) participating in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), whether at a free, reduced or paid rate, will receive a breakfast and/or lunch meal that meets USDA requirements, regardless of whether the students have sufficient money in the meal-charge accounts or cash-in-hand to pay for the cost of the meal at the time of the service.

Purpose:

This policy is established to provide consistent meal charge account procedures throughout The Potter's House.

Policy Goals:

1. To treat all students and families with dignity and respect.
2. To establish a consistent policy regarding charges and collection of charges.
3. To encourage parents and guardians to assume the responsibility of meal payments and to promote self-responsibility of the student.
4. To support positive interactions with TPH staff, TPH business policies, students and parents/guardians to the maximum extent possible.

Responsibilities:

Parents/Guardians

Parents/Guardians are responsible for paying for all of their student's meal charges. Uncollected meal charges shall be handled the same as any other school debt. Repeated failure to address meal charges may result in referral to an agency for collection. All meals eaten before a free or reduced-price meal application is processed or approved are the responsibility of the parent and must be paid for in a timely manner. Parents are encouraged to see the Food Service Director for payment for meals and/or use Educate (Point of Sale) to track purchases made by their student(s) and to make payments. ***Parents, who wish to prohibit their students from charging meals, can contact the Food Service Department and/or Business office to request the student account be closed.***

Food Service Department

The Food Service Department is responsible for maintaining charge records and notifying the Business Office and Parents/Guardians of outstanding balances. The Food Service Department and/or Business Office will issue a notice to parent(s) whose student(s) has a delinquent account. Regularly, the Food Service Department will run a report showing all student accounts with a negative food account balance. The Food Service Department/Business Office will provide a notification letter via email to the Parents/Guardians.

The Food Service Department is responsible in providing a meal which meets the School Breakfast Program (SBP) or National School Lunch Program (NSLP) requirements to all students.

The Potter's House

The Potter's House is responsible for supporting the Food Service Department in unpaid meal charges. Unpaid meal charges will be carried over at the end of the school year as a delinquent debt and/or continued balance during the course of the next school year. In addition, collection efforts may continue into next school year.

Federal guidelines prohibit the Food Service Department from writing off bad debts as a result of charged meals. Every effort will be made to collect for unpaid meals. While not all inclusive, these measures may include the following:

- A telephone call to the parent.
- An email sent to the parent.

- School meal/lunch coordinator contacts parent(s) by phone
- School meal/lunch coordinator sends notices to place in teachers' mailboxes for students.
- School meal/lunch coordinator sends letters home from the Food Service Department.

When a student repeatedly comes to school without a meal from home or money to participate in the school meal program, such requests may indicate the family's need for free or reduced-price meals. School administrators and/or Food Service Director should work with the family to apply for school meal benefits. School meal status is treated as a confidential matter and should not be a consideration for families considering applying for assistance.

Applying for Free and Reduced Meals:

- A. Households may apply for free and reduced-price meals at any time during the school year. However, it is encouraged that all households apply at the beginning of each year before the school year starts and before any meal charges are applied to a student account. Meal applications are distributed to households in one of two ways:
- 1) **New Students:** Students enrolling for the first time at The Potter's House will receive an enrollment packet which will include the Free/Reduced application.
 - 2) **Re-enrolling Students:** Students re-enrolling and/or returning for the following school year will receive an email starting after July 1 and a letter in August (new students who enroll before August will also be receiving this letter as a reminder).
- B. Information about the application will also be communicated in our newsletter "Around The House." Households are encouraged to complete and return the applications as soon as possible. In addition, applications are available at the school office during regular business hours and online at www.tphgr.org. If household size changes or income changes, households may re-apply for meal benefits any time during the school year.
- 1) Households who apply for free and reduced-price meal benefits are responsible for payment of all school meals and accumulated charges until approval is granted. Federal guidelines allow a maximum of 10 operating days to approve a new application. No student is allowed a free or reduced-price meal without an approved application or direct certification information on file. Households will receive a notification letter of the student's eligibility showing the effective date. If a notification letter is not received within 10 operating days, the household should check with the approving official at the school to see if the application has been received.
 - 2) Households who are receiving 3SquaresVT or Reach-Up benefits will receive a notification of eligibility letter based on Direct Certification from the school if the school has received information about your student(s). If your household receives these benefits and you have not received this letter from the school, or the school has not received information regarding eligibility of your student(s), the household must contact the school immediately to provide current information.
 - 3) Free and reduced-price eligible students may receive a breakfast and a lunch each day at no charge, or reduced rate depending on their program eligibility.
 - 4) A la carte items, such as a separate carton of milk or a second entrée, are not allowed.

Collection of Unpaid Meal Debt:

When the student balance is negative \$20.00, the following collection activities will be followed:

- a. The Business Office will email the parent/guardian/household the amount of the unpaid balance on a regular basis and communicate the need to address the unpaid balance in a timely manner.

If the balance continues to be unpaid, the following options may be enacted, as well.

- The Food Service Manager/Director (or designated staff) will contact the household to request payment.

- The Food Service Manager/Director will contact the building principal if no payment is received.
- The building principal will contact the household to discuss the requirement of the household to provide meals for the student.
- All funds owed to the food service program will be paid in full on the last day of school.
- Checks returned with insufficient funds will follow the district's policy and be charged \$35

Refunds:

Refunds for withdrawn and/or graduating students require a written request (email, postal, or in person) for a refund of any money remaining in their account to be submitted. Graduating students also have the option to transfer funds to a sibling's account or to donate to a student in need with a written request.

This policy for unpaid meal charges is designed to ensure that all students who want to eat a school meal receive a meal without impediment(s). This policy should be reviewed with all school-level staff, including school nurses, school counselors, principals, assistant principals, and other administrators.

Created: November 2, 2020

Revised: January 19, 2021

2nd Revision: February 9, 2021

3rd Revision: February 10, 2021

4th Revision: April 18, 2023

Board Approved: June 17, 2024