

NUTRITION PROGRAM COLLECTION POLICY

A. Purpose and Background

- (1) National School Lunch, Breakfast, Special (Kindergarten) Milk and the After School Snack Program are federal programs in which this school participates. Pricing policies for school meals are determined at the local level, including decisions about whether or not to extend credit to parents who do not have meal money in their students' accounts or whether or not to provide alternate meals to such students.
- (2) Entheos Academy receives partial reimbursement for meals served to students who do not qualify for free meals. Parents must make payments to a student's account to make up the difference between the federal reimbursement and the cost of the meal. This policy applies only to school meal payments, not a la carte sales.
- (3) If students qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch, their meals are reimbursed in whole or in part with federal funds. Otherwise, the meal reimbursement is minimal and parents are expected to pay for their student(s') meals.
- (4) The purpose of this policy is to explain how Entheos Academy will notify parents/guardians about: money owed for student meals; of the school's procedures for providing meals if students' accounts are delinquent; and to assure and remind parents and school employees that students will never be confronted or embarrassed about money owed for school meals.

B. Definitions

- (1) **“Automated Meal Payment System”** (COMPASS) means a web based system which allows parents to review funds in students' meal accounts, informs parents of account balances and student meal payments and sends messages to the parent when funds in the account are low.
- (2) **“Collection Efforts”** means a collection agency or other means that Entheos Academy uses to collect delinquent lunch balances or contacts to parents by phone, mail, or other efforts to recoup unpaid meal balances. **Entheos Academy may not withhold student records for unpaid school meal balances.**
- (3) **“Delinquent Account”** means a student's meal fund account that does not have adequate funds to cover the meal charges by student/parent. Entheos Academy nutrition program is responsible for the collection of funds in advance of the meal being served, but the school has the responsibility for the collection of delinquent accounts.
- (4) **“Free Meal”** means a meal served to a student whose parents have qualified, based on federal standards, for free meals. The free meal receives the highest federal rate of reimbursement. The meal is served at no cost to the student.

- (5) **“Meal Charging”** means allowing students who do not have funds in their account to receive a reimbursable meal, with parents or other sources paying for these meals at a later time. Entheos Academy is not required by state or federal law to provide meals to students who do not have the funds to pay for the meal.
- (6) **“Parent”** means a student’s parent, legal guardian, or person acting as the parent for school purposes.
- (7) **“Paid Meal”** means a meal served to a student whose parents have not qualified for reduced-price or free meals. This meal receives the lowest amount of federal reimbursement. The parent must pay the lunch price established by Entheos Academy board.
- (8) **“Point of Service”** means the place at the end of the line where meal payments and counting of reimbursable meals occurs.
- (9) **“Reduced-Price Meal”** means a meal served to a student whose parents qualify for reduced-price meals. The federal rate of reimbursement for a reduced-price meal is less than for a free meal, but more than for a paid meal. The parent must pay \$.40/lunch and \$.30/breakfast.

(Note to the LEA: Schools may charge less than these amounts, but may not charge more and only the set amount is reimbursable to the LEA/school.)

- (10) **“Reimbursable Meal”** means a meal which meets the USDA requirements and may be claimed for payment from USDA.

C. Model Policy Components

- (1) Before school begins, parents shall receive information from Entheos Academy:
 - about school meals;
 - stating the prices for the meals;
 - informing parents how they may provide payment for meals;
 - informing parents how their students qualify for reduced-price or free meals;
 - informing parents what students will receive if their meal accounts are delinquent;
 - informing parents of the policy for delinquent accounts; and
 - training parents on the functions of the Automated Payment system (COMPASS) including such options as low balance reminders.
- (2) Entheos Academy will send reminders of the policy throughout the school year. Entheos Academy may send letters home, send school newsletter reminders, make

announcements, make phone calls, send emails or use other reasonable and effective means of communication to contact parents.

- (3) Entheos Academy will provide applications for free/reduced-price meals to parents at Registration. The school shall also provide the school's designated meal prices. Accompanying the information about the prices of school meals, parents will receive an application for free and reduced- price meals. The application is available in a variety of languages at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/family-friendly-application-translations> . The school will provide paper applications for parents who do not have access to on-line forms.
- (4) If the student's family receives benefits from the Special Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Family Employment Program (FEP) or the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), the household qualifies for meals at no charge, once the school receives notice of student's or family's eligibility, and does not have to complete or submit a free/reduced-price form. Schools will send the household an e-mail/letter informing parents of a student's eligibility for free meals. If a parent or family qualifies under one of these programs and has not received such a letter before school starts, the parent should contact the school food service.**

D. Payments and School Verification

- (1) Entheos Academy must verify at some point in each student's meal service, that the meal is reimbursable or non-reimbursable.
- (2) Entheos Academy shall credit meal payments from parents to the student's account before the meal period for funds collect the day before. This assures all funds are accurately applied to meal accounts in advance of students selecting school meals. Schools will apply payments to the purchase of the current day's meal first, and the payment of past-due accounts second.
- (3) If a student/family qualifies for free meals, no payments are due.
- (4) If a family qualifies for reduced-price meals, the school will charge no more than \$.40 for lunch or \$.30 for breakfast.
- (5) Parents may make payments to the school by online payments, mail or hand delivery. Payments should clearly indicate the account to which the funds should be credited (student's name and amount, if several students attend the school). Entheos Academy accepts online payments, checks, money orders and/or cash.

E. Identification of Delinquent Accounts

- (1) Entheos Academy will identify family or student accounts that do not have adequate balances to pay for student meals. Entheos Academy will identify these accounts daily and notify parents by email at the end of the day. The school will contact parents, as parents have directed, on the automated meal payment system (COMPASS), or by phone, e-mail, to allow parents to indicate how they wish to make payments. Entheos Academy may ask students to take notifications addressed to the parent home with them; however, the school may not tell students to “remind” their parents to send money to the school. It is the parent’s responsibility to pay the student’s account. Asking students to remind parents is inappropriate.
- (2) Entheos Academy will continue to provide full meals to all students and notify parents that the school will use collection efforts to pay for meals. Entheos Academy shall maintain documentation of parent notice.
- (3) Entheos Academy is not required to provide a meal at no cost if a student does not qualify for a free meal. Because federal funds may not be used for the expenses of these meals, the Entheos Academy must use state, local or other funds to cover the cost of the meals. Entheos Academy will provide notice to parents at designated times during the school year of the school’s policy for providing meals to students when accounts are delinquent. Entheos Academy will comply with all applicable state and federal laws in providing meals to students and in notifying parents.

F. Delinquent Balances and School Procedures

- (1) Entheos Academy will notify parents of students with delinquent balances in their school lunch accounts by such methods as:
 - a. the automated school lunch payment system (COMPASS);
 - b. e-mail;
 - c. telephone conversation with parent from nutrition staff;
 - d. telephone call from front office;
 - e. written notice sent to the parent by mail or carried home by the student in a sealed envelope;
- (2) If the parents have been notified, no payment is received, and the amount owed exceeds \$80, the account may be turned over to a collection agency). Entheos Academy will notify parents at least twice annually concerning their procedures for the collection of past-due accounts.
- (3) Entheos Academy may complete an application for free/reduced-price meals on behalf of the parents, if school personnel have knowledge of the parent’s financial circumstances and parents give permission. Entheos Academy will notify parents that an application has been completed on their behalf (“Eligibility Manual for School Meals,” August, 2013, pg. 36).

- (4) If a student repeatedly has no money in the student’s school lunch account and no student meals are provided from home, school officials will consider the circumstances in the home (e.g., potential abuse or neglect, homelessness, etc.) and may contact the Child Protective Services.

Additional Information:

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides funds for meals served in schools, including breakfast, lunch, after-school snacks and special milk. Federally funded programs are subject to the cost principles outlined in Title 2 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 225, Appendix B (formerly known as Office of Management and Budget Circular A-87), which states “bad debts, including losses arising from uncollectable accounts and other claims, related collection costs and related legal costs are unallowable.” When parents fail to pay for school meals, the school can be hurt financially.

Overt identification: no discrimination against any student is allowed because of their eligibility for free or reduced-price meals (7 CFR 210.9 (b) (12)).

All schools participating in the National School Lunch Program have signed a free and reduced-price policy statement. Schools should review the policy to assure they understand the implications and responsibilities of providing meals in the program. The school meal program has additional options for schools located in high poverty areas which eliminate student payment for meals entirely.

According to a study conducted by the School Nutrition Association (SNA) (“School District charge Policy and Procedure Components,” Dec., 2008), the following table shows the number or amount of meal charges allowed before action is taken.

Allowable Charges

	# of	Dollar
Range	1-10	\$4-\$75
Average	3	
Median	3	