



Great Hearts Louisiana, Inc.

MEAL CHARGE POLICY

Adopted: June 25, 2024

Our Governing Board of Directors for Great Hearts Louisiana, Inc. has developed and adopted the following policy. This policy will be reviewed and revised annually as necessary.

Purpose:

The goal of Great Hearts, in partnership with our food service vendor, is to provide students with nutritious and delicious food each day. However, unpaid meal charges place a financial burden on our schools and affect the classroom budget. The purpose of this policy is to remain compliant with federal, state, and local policies, to provide clear guidelines for the collection of payments and outstanding student meal balances, and to establish consistent meal account procedures throughout Great Hearts campuses.

Policy

Meal Service

Except as otherwise provided by Federal law, it is the responsibility of the guardians to provide their students with their meals. They can do this in one of three ways:

1. Send the meals with the child to school.
2. Pay for meals to be purchased at the school.
3. Apply and receive approval of eligibility to receive free or to pay a reduced price for meals.

Meal Accounts

A meal account is created for every student upon enrollment. Guardians are encouraged to access and register for account access online through <https://lingconnect.com> or the LINQConnect app. LINQConnect provides the guardians with access to account balances, ability to preload balances, student purchase history, the Free & Reduced Meal application.

Guardians should monitor account balances on the LINQConnect website or app. If a guardian does not have online access, they can contact the school for balance inquiries.

Free & Reduced Meal Application

Applications for Free & Reduced Price Meals: All families are encouraged to apply for free and reduced meals every school year through our online portal at <https://lingconnect.com> or via a hard copy submission to the Director of Operations or the Child Nutrition Director. Paper copies can be downloaded from our school website or obtained from the Great Hearts front office.

Students must requalify for eligibility benefits **every year** by submitting a new free and reduced meal application. Families can at any time submit a new application if there is a change in household income or family number during the school year.

A breakfast is defined as four items made up of a grain, fruit/vegetable, and milk offered/served. A lunch is defined as 5 components made up of a protein, grain, fruit, vegetable, and milk. All students are offered one (1) reimbursable breakfast and one (1) reimbursable lunch per school day. Charges of reimbursable meals will be based on each individual student's eligibility status.

Charging of a la carte items and second meals to a meal account shall not be permitted.

Meal Payments

Great Hearts Harveston uses LINQConnect to collect and process meal payments for reduced and paid students, as well as adult meal sales. Families will have access to load account funding, view existing balances, review student purchase history, as well as complete free and reduced meal applications via the LINQConnect parent portal at <https://linqconnect.com/>.

Cash and/or credit card payments will not be accepted at the point of service. For visitors, payment of meals must be processed at the front office. Cash or check are preferred payment methods.

Purchase Restrictions

Since studies show that improved nutrition has a direct impact on academic performance, memory, and other positive learning behaviors, Great Hearts will not deny a student a meal unless a guardian has specifically requested us to do so. If a guardian needs to restrict a student's purchases for financial or any other reason, they may do so online or by contacting the school. To restrict meal purchases or to set an overall account balance limit, please email the campus Director of Operations or the Child Nutrition Director.

Please make sure to communicate the restrictions to your student. If a student is served an item that cannot be returned to the serving line or starts eating it before checking out at the point of sale, they will be charged for that item, no matter the restrictions.

Negative Balances

Negative balances are not an allowable cost and cannot be absorbed by the Child Nutrition Program. This means that your campus must assume (pay for) any uncollectable meal debt. If the debt is more than fifty dollars (\$50.00), and has been transferred to the campus, Great Hearts reserves the right to limit your student's ability to participate in clubs, sports, dances, or any other extra-curricular activity or to place other restrictions on your student's school account as allowable by law, until the debt to the campus is either paid in full or on a current payment plan.

To maintain the financial integrity of your campus, Great Hearts reserves the right to prohibit or limit meal purchases when a student account is more than fifty dollars (\$50.00) overdrawn, regardless of guardian permissions.

If a student withdraws or graduates with a negative balance, guardians are still responsible for payment and the balance will be turned over to the campuses for collection.

Notification and Communication

Notification of negative account balances will be provided on a regular basis by email or phone. Negative and low balance alerts are emailed through LINQConnect (may appear as "Titan School Solutions") as well.

Great Hearts will privately contact the student's guardian in writing through email, text, and/or telephone to collect any unpaid meal charges.

If the guardian does not respond or fails to honor an agreed-upon payment plan, Great Hearts may, at its sole discretion, consider the debt uncollectable, transfer the debt to the campus, and limit your student's participation in extra-curricular activities (see **Negative Balances** section above) until the debt is paid off or on a current payment plan. In this case, Great Hearts will notify the student's guardian with a written, private notice via email, text, and/or mail.

Recovering Unrecovered or Delinquent Debt

Title 2, Code of Federal Regulations (2 CFR), Section 200.426: Bad debts are an unallowable cost to federal programs. According to federal guidance, unpaid meal charges are designated as unrecovered or delinquent debt until it is deemed uncollectable, at which time it becomes bad debt. The difference between unrecovered or delinquent debt and bad debt is described below:

- Unrecovered or delinquent debt refers to meal charges that have not been paid by the student(s) or parent(s) during the fiscal year.
- Bad debt is considered unrecovered or delinquent debt that, after all reasonable steps have been taken, has not been recovered by, or before, the end of the fiscal year in which the debt was incurred.

The SFA will take all reasonable steps to recover the unrecovered or delinquent debt, and if unsuccessful in collecting the debt by the end of the fiscal year, then LDOE considers the debt as bad debt and the SFA will use nonfederal funding sources to repay the NSFSA for the total amount.

Adult Meals

Adults are not allowed to charge any meals into the negative. Staff accounts are created upon hiring and funds may be pre-loaded to purchase meals. Staff may fund their accounts through LINQConnect or remit funds via check or cash at the front office.

Adults, faculty, and staff are not allowed to use a student's account to charge for any items not intended for the specific student, nor are they allowed to charge their own accounts for purchases for students.

Adults that are not faculty and staff must prepay for their meals at the front desk before purchase.

Point of Sale Accountability

Guardians are responsible for student purchases. To help ensure accuracy at the point of sale for lunch purchases, students will be provided with a unique punch code or lunch ID Card, issued by the school, to verify their identity. Guardians can monitor purchases through the meal service app or online. Statements of activity are available online or upon request.

Positive End of Year Balances

A positive balance will automatically rollover to the following school year for returning students. Refund of positive balances must be submitted in writing to your campus.

Non-Discrimination Policy Notice

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. **Mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. **Fax:** (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. **Email:** program.intake@usda.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.