

Great Hearts Texas Meal Charge Policy

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 (Reduced rate is free for breakfast and \$0.40 for lunch).

Meal Accounts

A meal account is created for every student upon enrollment. Guardians can access these accounts through the LINQConnect website or app. LINQConnect provides the guardians with access to account balances, student purchase history, and 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 and students can ask for their balance at the point of sale.

Free & Reduced Meal Application

If a guardian is unable to provide a meal for their child, they are encouraged to complete the application for free or reduced meals (available in English and Spanish) online or at any Great Hearts school.

Students must requalify for benefits **every year**.

Applications can be completed at **any time** during the school year and are effective from the date of submission until thirty (30) days into the next school year (to give guardians time to renew). If

determined to be eligible, children can receive one (1) regular breakfast meal and one (1) regular lunch meal each at a free or reduced rate (depending on eligibility level). A breakfast “meal” consists of a fruit or vegetable, plus two more items. A lunch “meal” consists of items from at least 3 of the following components: protein, grain, vegetable, fruit, and milk. One of the components must be a fruit or vegetable.

Any extra entrées or sides, incomplete meals, second meals, or a la carte purchases (milk only, cookies, chips, etc.) are charged at the full price rate, no matter the student’s eligibility.

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 a la carte or extra item 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. Additionally, if a student’s account is more than five dollars (\$5.00) overdrawn, or the purchase will cause them to be more than five dollars (\$5.00) overdrawn, the student will not be allowed to purchase any a la carte items (milk, incomplete meals, extra entrees, or other items).

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.

Adult Meals

The same negative balance policy will apply to faculty and staff participating in the school lunch program, except that faculty and staff will have a meal limit of negative twenty dollars (\$20.00). Great Hearts reserves the right to collect any outstanding/uncollectable debt by any legal means available.

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 use an ID card with a barcode 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.

Payments

Great Hearts is committed to providing meals for students who choose to participate in the program. However, it is the responsibility of the guardians to satisfy all financial obligations to the lunch program in a timely manner.

Guardians can pay online or by cash or check (preferred) at their campus. Checks are to be made payable to the campus, with their student’s name(s) and “lunch money” in the subject line. Great Hearts strongly encourages guardians to pre-pay for their student’s meals.

Positive End of Year Balances

A positive balance will automatically rollover to the following school year for returning students.

Any refund or donation requests must be submitted in online writing (<https://texas.greatheartamerica.org/academy-life/meal-program/meal-account/>) for any positive or remaining balances for current, graduated, or withdrawn students. (Please contact your campus if you do not have online access.)

If a student withdraws or graduates with a remaining balance of five dollars (\$5.00) or less and has not requested a refund within sixty (60) days, their balance will be donated to their campus' Feed It Forward fund.

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.

Feed It Forward

Great Hearts accepts donations through the Feed It Forward option in LINQConnect, or by cash or check at your campus. The Feed It Forward fund allows those that wish to help their campus cover student meal debt. Donations are added to the fund of the student's enrolled campus or at the designated campus or student.

At the end of the year, and before the campuses assume student debt, the Feed It Forward funds at each campus are distributed to cover their student's negative balance in the following order until the funds are exhausted:

1. Students that are eligible for free meals.
2. Students that are eligible for reduced meals.
3. Students that are not eligible for free or reduced meals.
4. Students from other campuses that were not covered by donated funds from their school's fund, in the same order (free, reduced, then not eligible for free/reduced meals).

To help out the most students, students will be sorted from least amount owed to most amount owed within each eligibility category before distributing the funds.

Non-Discrimination Policy

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

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.