



534 UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students receive healthy and nutritious meals through the school district's nutrition program and that school district employees, parent(s)/guardian(s), and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding meal charges. The policy seeks to allow students to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day and minimize identification of students with insufficient funds to pay for school meals as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT

Students will receive a breakfast and lunch of their choice regardless of the child's account balance; however, parent(s)/guardian(s) will continue to be responsible to pay for all meal charges, including negative balances. Students with negative balances will not be allowed to purchase ala carte items or additional milk, entrees, or side items. School Employees with a meal balance that exceeds negative \$10.00 will not be able to purchase meals.

III. PAYMENT OF MEALS

- A. The school district will utilize a prepaid system for food service program meals. We encourage families and employees to keep a positive balance in their account(s) to ensure that students and employees have sufficient funds.
- B. It is the parent(s)/guardian(s)'s or employee's responsibility to monitor their meal account balances and send money on a regular basis to keep the meal accounts current. The district encourages all participants to sign up for and utilize the district's online school meal prepayment system.
- C. The school district receives school lunch aid under Minn. Stat. § 124D.111. Therefore, it must make lunch available without charge to all participating students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals regardless of account balance. Parent(s)/guardian(s) may apply for free or reduced-price meals anytime during the school year. Meal applications are distributed to all parent(s)/guardian(s) in the district prior to the student's first day of classes. Applications are also available at the District Office, in the Main Office of each school building, as well as on the district website. If household income or size



changes, parent(s)/guardian(s) can apply for meal benefits anytime during the school year.

- G. If a parent/guardian chooses to send in one payment that is to be divided between sibling accounts, the parent/guardian must specify how the funds are to be distributed to the students' accounts. Funds may not be transferred between sibling accounts unless written permission is received from the parent/guardian.

IV. LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES – NOTIFICATION

- A. The school district will make reasonable efforts to notify parent(s)/guardian(s) and employees of a low account balance when the account is at or below \$9.00, via the district's automated alert notification system. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program. A meal will not be taken away from a student with an overdrawn account.
- B. Parent(s)/guardian(s) will receive a negative balance notification when their student's account is below \$0.00, twice per week via the district's automated alert notification system.
- D. When an account balance reaches negative \$50, the Food & Nutrition Services Department shall notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) via letter. Such letter shall notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the expectation that the account be brought to a positive balance within ten days or as specified in a repayment plan, and will include a meal application (if one is not already on file).
- E. When an account balance reaches negative \$75, building principals shall contact the parent(s)/guardian(s) via phone to communicate the expectation that the account be brought to a positive balance within ten days or as specified in a repayment plan.

The following individuals may personally call students' parent(s)/guardian(s), mail letters, or send letters home in students' backpacks if necessary:

- Food & Nutrition Services Department Director or secretary
- Individual school buildings principals, secretaries, social workers, or community support social workers.

V. UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- A. The school district will make reasonable efforts to communicate with parents(s)/guardian(s) to resolve the matter of unpaid charges. Where appropriate,



parent(s)/guardian(s) may be encouraged to apply for free and reduced-price meals for their children.

- B. The school district will make reasonable efforts to collect unpaid meal charges classified as delinquent debt from parent(s)/guardian(s). Unpaid meal charges are designated as delinquent debt when payment is overdue, the debt is considered collectable, and efforts are being made to collect it.
- C. Negative balances of more than \$100, not paid prior to the end of the school year, will be turned over to the superintendent or superintendent's designee for collection. Collection options may include, but are not limited to, use of collection agencies, claims in the conciliation court, or any other legal method permitted by law.

VI. COMMUNICATION OF POLICY

- A. This policy and any pertinent supporting information shall be provided in writing or via the student handbook to:
 - 1. All households at or before the start of each school year;
 - 2. Students and parent(s)/guardian(s) who transfer into the school district, at the time of enrollment; and
 - 3. All school district personnel who are responsible for enforcing this policy.
- B. The school district may post the policy on the school district's website, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

Legal References: Minn. Stat. § 124D.111, Subd. 4
42 U.S.C. § 1751 *et seq.* (Healthy and Hunger-Free Kids Act)
7 C.F.R. § 210 *et seq.* (School Lunch Program Regulations)
7 C.F.R. § 220.8 (School Breakfast Program Regulations)
USDA Policy Memorandum SP 46-2016, Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies (2016)
USDA Policy Memorandum SP 47-2016, Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments (2016)
USDA Policy Memorandum SP 23-2017, Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A
Minn. Op. Atty. Gen. 169j (May 14, 2019) (*Letter to Ricker*)



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