

STUDENT PERSONNEL – UNPAID MEAL CHARGES SCHOOL MEALS POLICY

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, families, and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding meal charges. **The policy of the school district is to provide meals to students in a respectful manner and to maintain the dignity of students by prohibiting lunch shaming or otherwise ostracizing the student.** 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. PAYMENT OF MEALS

- A. Students have use of a meal account. Meal accounts are debit accounts, therefore money must be in the account in order for the student to use it. We encourage parents/guardians to pay in advance of the first day of school. When an account reaches -.01 a student shall not be allowed to charge extra entrees, meals or ala carte items until the negative account balance is paid. Payments can be made by electronic payment option, pay at the school office, or send payment to the Food Service Office at 502 Minnesota Ave NW Bemidji, MN 56601.

Money can be deposited into student meal accounts via these options:

1. Food Service Drop Boxes located in each elementary school office or middle school and high school cafeteria ala carte windows.
 2. Using credit/debit cards on line at our school district web site: <http://bemidji.revtrak.net/tek9.asp>
 3. Mailed to Bemidji School District Food Service Department.
- B. If the school district receives school lunch aid under Minnesota Statutes section § 124D.111, it must make lunch available without charge to all participating students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals regardless of account balance.
- ~~C. Charging of school meals is discouraged. Food service staff will contact parents/guardians of negative meal accounts to arrange payment.~~
- ~~All students will be provided a meal regardless of meal account status.~~
- ~~D. If a parent or guardian chooses to send in one payment that is to be divided between sibling accounts, the parent or guardian must specify how the funds are to be distributed to the students' accounts.~~

- C. A student with an outstanding meal charge debt will be allowed to purchase a meal.
- D. A student who has been determined to be eligible for free and reduced-price lunch always must be served a reimbursable meal even if the student has an outstanding debt.
- E. Once a meal has been placed on a student's tray or otherwise served to a student, the meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meals balance.
- F. The school district will accommodate special dietary needs with respect to alternate meals.
- G. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item.
- H. If a parent or guardian chooses to send in one payment that is to be divided between sibling accounts, the parent or 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 or guardian.

III. LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES – NOTIFICATION

- A. The school district will make reasonable efforts to notify families when meal account balances are low or fall below zero.
- B. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches -.01. Families will be notified by an automated calling system, email, and letters sent home.
- C. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program **including, but not limited to, dumping meals, withdrawing a meal that has been served, announcing or listing students' names publicly, or affixing stickers, stamps, or pins.**

IV. UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- A. The school district will make reasonable efforts to communicate with families to resolve the matter of unpaid charges. Where appropriate, families 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. 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. Reasonable efforts will be been made by the school district food service department to collect the unpaid school meal debt. 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.

D. The school district may not enlist the assistance of non-school district employees, such as volunteers, to engage in debt collection efforts.

E. The school district will not impose any other restriction prohibited under Minnesota Statutes section 123B.37 due to unpaid student meal balances. The school district will not limit a student's participation in any school activities, graduation ceremonies, field trips, athletics, activity clubs, or other extracurricular activities or access to materials, technology, or other items provided to students due to an unpaid student meal balance.

V. COMMUNICATION OF POLICY

A. This policy and any pertinent supporting information shall be provided in writing (i.e., mail, email, back-to-school packet, student handbook, etc.) to:

1. all households at or before the start of each school year;
2. students and families 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 will** post **the this** policy on the school district's website, **or the website of the organization where the meal is served**, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

C. If the school district contracts with a third party for its meal services, it will provide the vendor with its school meal policy. The school district will ensure that any third party provider with whom the school district enters into either an original or modified contract after July 1, 2021, adheres to the school district's school meals policy.

Legal References:

Minn. Stat. § 123B.37 (Prohibited Fees)

Minn. Stat. § 124D.111, ~~Subd. 4~~ **(Lunch Aid; Food Service Accounting)**

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)

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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