

Adopted: December 6, 2021

Revised/

Reviewed: January 9, 2023

534 SCHOOL MEALS

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. When the balance reaches zero, a student may charge no more than a standard complete meal to this account. Seconds and a la carte items may not be charged until the negative account balance is paid and the balance is positive. Families may add money into their meal account by bringing cash or a check to any school buildings front office or pay online through the Meal Account portal; Wordware. Families also have the option to set up autopay through their Wordware account.
- 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. 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.
- D. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge ala carte snack items, second entrees, or second meals. Once informed by the cashier that there are not adequate funds to purchase the item(s), they can either return the snack items or the cashier will return it for the student.
- E. Payments added to the meal account will be shared between all students in the family.

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 a low balance once the meal account reaches \$15.00. Families will be notified through automated emails and calling system. Families with a negative meal account balance will receive these automated messages Monday-Friday.
- 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 first meals, withdrawing a first 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. Negative balances of more than \$25, not paid prior to the end of the school year will be turned over to the Director of Business Services for collection. In some instances, the school district does use a collection agency to collect unpaid school meal debts after reasonable efforts first have been made by the school district to collect the 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 will post this policy on the school district’s website, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

VI. ANGEL FUND

- A. The Becker School District maintains a donation account through the Wordware meal account software. Individuals and/or groups are able to donate to the Angel Fund. Funds are used to pay off negative meal account balances for families that accrued the balance before they qualified for free and reduced meals. Funds are also used for families experiencing temporary financial struggles that do not qualify for free and reduced price lunches as well as other unique circumstances.

Legal References: Minn. Stat. § 123B.37 (Prohibited Fees)
Minn. Stat. § 124D.111 (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)
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

Cross References: *None*