

798 UNPAID MEAL CHARGE AND DEBT COLLECTION PROCEDURE**INTRODUCTION:**

Beginning July 1, 2017, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) required all Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to have a written and clearly communicated meal charge policy, which needs to be distributed to households at the start of each school year. This policy delineates how students will be charged for meals, as well as offering alternate meals, limits on meal charges, or allowing neither meal charges nor alternate meals when a student's account has insufficient funds. This policy also includes information about how unpaid meal debt will be collected. It is important that all staff who are responsible for enforcement of this policy, including food service staff, office/administrative staff, principals, social workers, homeless liaison, etc., be aware of the policy.

Minnesota statute requires that "any reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances do not demean or stigmatize any child participating in the school lunch program". Collecting and asking for meal payments should be done in a respectful manner. School districts are in the best position to understand their school community's attitudes, beliefs and cultural sensitivities on methods of reminding and collecting payments. At no time should a meal policy target or shame students for financial considerations beyond their control.

When districts notify households of the meal charge and collection policy/procedure, multiple methods of distributing the information should be used. Options are to include, published in the student/parent handbook, the back-to-school free/reduced-price meal application, school/district newsletter, or posted on the school/district website. However, USDA requires that all LEAs provide written information directly to households. Posting the policy on the district website alone is not sufficient.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent district practices for the provision of meals to students and staff, and to support positive and clear communication of the responsibilities of school district staff, parents/guardians, and students as to the management of the family accounts those meals are charged to.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

- A. The Crosby-Ironton School District's goal is to provide students with nutritious meals that meet state and federal guidelines and promote healthy eating habits that enhance learning, while maintaining the financial integrity of the National School Breakfast and Lunch program.
- B. Crosby-Ironton Schools recognize that it is the parent/guardians responsibility to maintain a positive balance to cover the purchase of meals and to make immediate payment when funds are depleted, or to provide meals for their students from home that provide the nutrition to support learning success.
- C. Crosby-Ironton Schools recognizes its responsibility to maintain purchase records and make them available to parents/guardians through on-line access or, when requested,

by phone or mail.

- D. Families may apply for free/reduced-price meal benefits anytime during the school year. Meal applications are distributed to all families in the district, prior to the students' first day of class. In addition, applications are available at the districts website, at any school office or through the food services department. If household income or the number of family members changes, families can apply for meal benefits anytime during the school year.

III. CHARGE POLICY

- A. If the family account has insufficient funds to pay for breakfast and/or lunch meals, the food service department will allow the charge of three (3) meals per student in each family to allow time for the credit of payment into the family account. Meals are defined as a reimbursable breakfast or lunch. The charging of any a la carte items, including milk, will not be allowed.
- B. When this threshold is met, one or both of the parents will be called at the phone number they have provided the district, with the message that they must remit payment or provide meals from home until a payment can be made. If no phone number is available, the notice will be sent by mail. At this time, the building principal **and or administrative team will be notified.** ~~and the school's county family collaborative worker will be notified. If a child comes to school without a lunch provided from home, an alternate school lunch will be discreetly provided prior to the meal service period. This will be provided for a maximum of three (3) days and will not be charged to the family account.~~ At this time, if a payment is not received or if meals are not being provided from home, the district may choose to contact social services and request assistance.
- C. Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals will always be served a meal regardless of unpaid food service accounts. When a student eligible for PAID meals has cash in hand to pay for a meal, the student will be served a meal regardless of unpaid food service accounts. There will be a No Cash Back policy and any remaining money from the purchase will be credited toward the outstanding balance.

IV. NOTIFICATION OF ACCOUNT STATUS

- A. Family notification procedures:
- Families can check their student's purchases and meal account balance by requesting access to view their family records in the district's JMC software. Access requests can be found on the district's website.
 - Families can contact the food service office by email or phone for account balances.
 - The food service department will send a minimum of a once weekly e-mail to all parents who have provided email addresses, advising them of the student meal account balance.

- Households will be regularly apprised of low student meal account balances through our school district automated calling service.
- **High School s**Students will be given a written and/or verbal reminder in the meal service line. At the elementary school, low balance notices will be sent home ~~in~~ the Friday folders.

B. The student/family can make payments by:

- Using the district's on- line payment system called PaySchools that can be accessed through the schools website
- Sending a check or money order by mail.
- Making a payment at the food service office or at any school building office.
- When cash payments are made, a receipt for payment will always be offered. There will be a No Cash Back policy and the whole sum will be credited to the meal account.
- Checks that are returned to the district and cannot be collected, for any reason, will be deducted from the meal account along with any fees the district incurs.

C. Collection of Unpaid Meal Debt:

When the family has an unresolved outstanding meal balance the following collection actions will be taken:

- The food service director will contact the parent/guardian to determine an appropriate solution.
- The building principal or their designee will contact the family and review with them their responsibility to provide meals for their student.
- Assistance from the county social services may be requested by the school if parents refuse to provide meals or pay for school prepared meals for their children.

Policy mimics MSBA Policy #534