

## **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, families, 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. PAYMENT OF MEALS**

A. Payment for lunch is expected at the time the meal is served. Parents have three options to put money in their child's lunch account:

1. Online payment
2. Check
3. Cash

When a student lunch balance reaches zero or becomes negative: All students, elementary, middle and high school will be allowed to charge lunch meals regardless of a zero or negative balance but not allowed to make a la carte purchases

B. If the school district receives school lunch aid under Minn. Stat. § 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. In the instance of a student who has an outstanding meal charge debt, the student will be allowed to pay for a full price meal without applying the student's money toward the meal debt balance.

E. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a la carte items.

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. Funds may not be transferred between sibling accounts unless verbal or 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 balance are low.

B. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program.

#### **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. Consistent with the treatment of other debts owed to the district, negative balances of \$50.00 or more, incurred by families and not paid prior to end of the school year, will be subject to handling by a collection agency. 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. Student lunch debt of \$49.99 or less is transferred with the student to the next school year by the Child Nutrition Department. Positive lunch balances/monies in the student's account advance with the student as well. Parents' may request a refund of a positive lunch balance/monies.

#### **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 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

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