

Adopted: December 18, 2017

Revised: March 23, 2020

Revised: February 27, 2023

Revised: August 25, 2025

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. Students have use of a family meal account. Families may add money to students' accounts by dropping payments off in the school offices or in the district office or online via Family Access through ePaytrak.
- B. Free School Meals Program
 - 1. The free school meals program is created within the Minnesota Department of Education
 - 2. Each school that participates in the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch program and has an Identified Student Percentage below the federal percentage determined for all meals to be reimbursed at the free rate via the Community Eligibility Provision must participate in the free school meals program.
 - 3. Each school that participates in the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch program and has an Identified Student Percentage at or above the federal percentage determined for all meals to be reimbursed at the free rate must participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision in order to participate in the free school meals program.
 - 4. Each school that participates in the free school meals program must:

- a. participate in the United States Department of Agriculture School Breakfast Program and the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program; and
 - b. provide to all students at no cost up to two federally reimbursable meals per school day, with a maximum of one free breakfast and one free lunch.
 - c. A student who has been determined eligible for free and reduced-price meals must always be served a reimbursable meal even if the student has an outstanding debt.
- C. 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.
- D. A student with an outstanding meal charge debt will be allowed to purchase a meal.
- E. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item, a second lunch or a second entree.
- F. 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 either the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meals balance.
- G. A student may purchase a second breakfast at the nonprogram price if the student has already selected a reimbursable breakfast.
- H. A student may purchase a second lunch at the nonprogram price if the student has already selected a reimbursable lunch.

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 account balance reaches \$10.00. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches \$0.01. Families will be notified by automated telephone calls, emails from building administrative assistants, letters sent home and/or telephone calls from the building principals.
- C. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program. A first meal will

not be taken away from a student with an overdrawn account; however, a student may be denied a second meal or entre if they have a negative account balance.

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 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.
- 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 may not deny any student the opportunity to participate in graduation ceremonies or other commencement activities due to unpaid meal charges.

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

Minn. Op. Atty. Gen. 169j (May 14, 2019) (*Letter to Ricker*)