



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 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 a la carte items or seconds as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

II. PAYMENT OF MEALS

- A. All a la carte items or second meal purchases are to be prepaid before meal service begins on the district website under: Parents - Online Payments - Food Service/MealPay Plus. A student who does not have sufficient funds will not be allowed to charge a la carte items or a second meal until additional money is deposited in the student's account.
- B. A 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.
- C. Each school that participates in the free school meals program must:
 - 1. participate in the United States Department of Agriculture School Breakfast Program and the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program; and
 - 2. 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.
- D. Once a meal has been placed on a student's tray or otherwise served to a student, the meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meal balance.

- E. When the student has a negative balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item.
- F. If a parent/guardian chooses to send in one payment that is to be divided between sibling accounts, the parent/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/guardian.

III. LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES – NOTIFICATION

- A. The school district will make reasonable efforts to notify families and employees when meal account balances are low or fall below zero, ~~of a low account balance when the account is below \$0.00, via the district's automated alert notification system. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program. A meal will not be taken away from a student with an overdrawn account.~~¶¶
- B. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance notification when their student's account is below \$0.00, twice per week via the district's automated alert notification system.
- 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, providing alternative meals not specifically related to dietary needs; providing non reimbursable meals; or affixing stickers, stamps, or pins. 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, providing alternative meals not specifically related to dietary needs; providing non reimbursable meals; or affixing stickers, stamps, or pins.~~
- D. ~~When an account balance reaches negative \$50, the Food & Nutrition Services Department shall notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) via letter. Such letter shall notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the expectation that the account be brought to a positive balance within ten days or as specified in a repayment plan, and will include a meal application (if one is not already on file).~~¶¶

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~~E. When an account balance reaches negative \$75, building principals shall contact the parent(s)/guardian(s) via phone to communicate the expectation that the account be brought to a positive balance within ten days or as specified in a repayment plan.¶~~

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~~The following individuals may personally call students' parent(s)/guardian(s), mail letters, or send letters home in students' backpacks if necessary:¶~~

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~~• Food & Nutrition Services Department Director or secretary¶~~

~~Individual school buildings principals, secretaries, social workers, or community support social workers.~~

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 \$100, not paid prior to the end of the school year, will be turned over to the superintendent or superintendent's designee 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 or via the student handbook 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 the policy on the school district’s website, 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 meals 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 (School Meals Policies; 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*

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