

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 employee, 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

Family balances are available on the Parent Portal. The Parent Portal may be accessed through the district's website. Statements may be requested from the Food Service Director via email or telephone anytime. The email address of the Director is posted on the District website.

- A. The Food Service Program is a pre-payment program. Families are expected to have a positive balance in the food service account at the beginning of the year and during the course of the school year.
- B. The parent/guardian will be notified by the director via email when the family account reaches a balance of \$25.00 or less.
- C. All students in grades K-12 will be notified in the lunch line at check-out each day when their account is at \$5.00 or less.
- D. Ala carte items may be purchased cash-in-line for negative account-balance families.
- E. Statements are also mailed at the end of each week to families with a negative balance in their food service account.
- F. If a family account drops below \$0.00, Food Service staff or director will call the family via the phone number on file. If the family cannot be contacted, a letter will be sent to the address on file.

Individual lunch account privileges within families with negative account balances of \$25.00 or more may, at the discretion of food service leadership and school administration, be deactivated or suspended to prevent further unpaid purchases from occurring. Notification of this action will be sent by letter to the family address on file.

- G. Assistance from county Social Services may be requested by the school social worker for possible neglect when above procedures are unsuccessful.
- H. 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.
- I. A student with an outstanding meal charge debt will be allowed to purchase a meal if the student pays for the meal when it is received.
- J. The school district may provide an alternate meal that meets federal and state requirements to a student who does not have sufficient funds in the student's account or cannot pay cash for a meal. The school district will accommodate special dietary needs with respect to alternate meals. The cost of the alternative meal (*not to exceed student meal pricing*) will be charged to the student's account or otherwise charged to the student.
- K. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item.
- L. 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 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 balances are low or fall below zero.
- B. The parent/guardian will be notified by the director via email when the family account reaches a balance of \$25.00 or less. All students in grades K-12 will be notified in the lunch line at check-out each day when their account is at \$5.00 or less. Ala carte items may be purchased cash-in-line for negative account-balance families. Statements are also mailed at the end of each week to families with a negative balance in their food service account. If a family account drops below \$0.00, Food Service staff or director will call the family via the phone number on file. If the family cannot be contacted, a letter will be sent to the address on file.

Individual lunch account privileges within families with negative account balances of \$25.00 or more may, at the discretion of food service leadership and school administration, be deactivated or suspended to prevent further unpaid purchases from occurring. Notification of this action will be sent by letter to the family address on file.

- C. 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. Negative balances of more than \$100 not paid prior to the end of 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.

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 school 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)