

**534 UNPAID MEAL CHARGES****UNPAID MEAL POLICY****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. General Statement of Policy**

- A. Albany Area Schools goal is to provide nutritious meals to students to promote healthy eating habits and enhance learning.
- B. It is the policy of Albany Area Schools to offer breakfast and lunch meals that meet state and federal guidelines.
- C. Payments to your family account may be made online, you may access this through the website [www.district745.org](http://www.district745.org) and then go to the lunch tab. You may also send a payment with your student in an envelope provided by the school clearly labeled with the student's name and parent's name on it.
- D. All families are encouraged 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 student's first day of classes, these maybe picked up at open house night. In addition, applications are available online at [www.district745.org](http://www.district745.org) under the lunch tab. If household income or size change, families can apply for meal benefits anytime during the school year.

**III. Payment of Meals**

- A. If the student or family account has insufficient funds to pay for breakfast and lunch meals, the student will be offered an alternative meal.

Students will be allowed to charge up to -\$10.00

Students in elementary grades will always be given a meal.

A "courtesy meal" consisting of peanut butter sandwich, fruit, veggies and milk will be offered at lunch for grades 6-12 when the balance is negative.

Students with an overdrawn account are not allowed to charge ala carte items.

- B. 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. The “cash in hand” will not be applied towards past due balances.

#### **IV. Notification of Account Status**

- A. Low Balance notices are sent out via email 3 times weekly via email account set up in the JMC notification system. If there is no response after 3 emails, a phone call will be made. Families without email will be contacted via phone.

Families can check their child’s meal account balance via JMC.

Families can contact the Food Service Office for account balances.

Students will be given verbal reminder in the meal service line.

- B. The student/family will be notified when the account has a low balance of \$10.00

Emails will be sent 3 times a week to notify families with a low or negative balance. If there is no response after 3 emails, a phone call will be made. Families without email will be contacted via phone.

Food Service Department will encourage parents to complete the free/reduced-price meal application.

An email reminder is sent to parents requesting a payment when student accounts do not have adequate funds.

A second request for payment is sent if parents have not responded to the first request.

A letter/invoice is maybe sent via US Post to the household requesting payment.

NSF checks will follow district policy which can be found on the website under school board policies.

Notification methods may be different depending on grade groups and individual circumstances.

#### **V. Collection of Unpaid Meal Debt**

- A. When the student meal balance is -\$15.00 the following collection actions will be taken:  
Elementary: The parent is called and student will need a cold lunch sent until negative balance is paid.

Middle School & High School: Students will be offered an alternative meal up to 3 times. The student will be served a meal if they have cash in the line to pay for the meal.

A formal letter will be sent to the household notifying that the debt will be turned over to the collection agency and the student meal account will be closed.

The expectation is all fees owed to the district will be paid in full on the last day the student will be attending classes.

- C. Negative balances of more than \$30.00, not paid prior to end of semester, 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.

## **VI. 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