

**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 meal account. When the balance reaches zero, a student may charge no more than 2 meals in grades K-8 and 1 meal in grades 9-12 to this account. When an account reaches this limit, a student shall not be allowed to charge la carte items until the negative account balance is paid. Families may add money to students' accounts (e.g., electronic payment options on the district web site, pay at the school office, or cashier during meal times).
- 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. 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 will be at a reduced rate and be charged to the student's account or otherwise charged to the student.
- D. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge snack items or a la carte items.
- E. 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 and/or phone call 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. A meal will not be taken away from a student with an overdrawn account.
- B. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches 2 meals in grades K-8 and 1 meal in grades 9-12. Families will be notified by an automated system, phone call, email or letter sent home.
- 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 2 meals in grades K-8 and 1 meal in grades 9-12, not paid prior to the end of the school year, may 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 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.

*Adopted: 6/26/2017*

*Revised: 11/25/2019; 06/22/2020*