



## 721.4 SCHOOL NEGATIVE MEAL CHARGE POLICY

### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent practices for South Washington County School's (SoWashCo) negative meal accounts and/or the collection of unpaid meal debt. Students will have access to healthy and nutritious meals through the Nutrition Services program. School district employees, families and students will have a clear understanding of expectations regarding meal charges. 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 to minimize identification of students with insufficient funds to pay for ala carte items or second meals as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

### II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

- A. SoWashCo offers one reimbursable breakfast and lunch free of charge to all grade levels. The Nutrition Services Department strives to produce high-quality meals at a reasonable cost that meet both state and federal guidelines.
- B. Students and/or district employees may purchase meals ala carte items or second meals when funds have been deposited into their meal account with cash, check or online through the district's meal payment system.
- C. Households may apply for free/reduced meals Education Benefits once the application period opens and any time during the active school year. If household size or income changes, families can apply or reapply for meal benefits.
- D. Families must submit a new education benefits (free and reduced priced meals) application each year. Prior to the start of each school year, families will receive notice to complete the application. Information will direct families to a website to complete the Application for Education Benefits online or download and print a paper application. Applications are also available in new enrollment packets, each school's office and at the District Service Center in both English and Spanish. Applications in other languages are also available by request.
- E. Students will be allowed to participate in the meal program regardless of meal account balance; however, parents will continue to be responsible to pay for all meal charges, including negative balances.

### III. ~~LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES – NOTIFICATION~~

#### MEAL CHARGE PROCESS

- A. Students are required to go to the cafeteria and enter their PIN number so that their personal account can be accessed. ~~Families who pay for reimbursable meals will be notified via automated phone calls and/or email and text messages when a student's meal account falls to \$5 or less. Families are expected to have a current working phone number and/or email to be alerted to meal account notices.~~
- B. Students are allowed to receive one reimbursable breakfast and one lunch daily. All other items are required to be charged to the student's account.
- C. Once a student's account is negative, they will only be provided a reimbursable meal and will not be able to add other menu items to their meal. Staff will ensure this process will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program.
- ~~D. If a cashier inadvertently allows an ala carte purchase to go through and funds are not available, the account will go negative the family will be responsible for the debt. Once the student's account reaches negative \$30, the school's administration will contact the parent to make reasonable efforts to resolve the unpaid meal balance. The meal charge policy will be discussed with families and where appropriate, families may be encouraged to apply for free and reduced price meals for their children.~~
- ~~E. Letters will be mailed quarterly notifying families of any negative meal balances. When an account balance reaches negative \$50, the account will be considered a delinquent debt and the district will notify the family via email. Families will be instructed to bring the account to a positive balance within 14 days and to complete an Application for Educational Benefits if one is not already on file.~~
- ~~F. When an account balance reaches negative \$50, the district reserves the right to prohibit student participation in fee-based programs, until the balance is paid in full.~~

#### IV. UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- A. 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.
- B. Collection options may include, but are not limited to, use of Collection Agencies, claims in the conciliation court, or any other method permitted by law.



- C. Other than Collection Agencies, 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 supporting information will be provided in writing to all households at or before the start of each school year. Students and families who transfer into the school district will also receive the meal charge policy at the time of enrollment.
- B. The school district will post the policy on the school district's website, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

- (1) **mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
- (2) **fax:** (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) **email:** [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov)

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**POLICY CREATED:** August 25, 2022