

534 SCHOOL MEALS POLICY

[Note: In 2021, the Minnesota legislature amended Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.111, to require that Minnesota school districts that participate in the national school lunch program adopt a school meals policy. In 2023, the Minnesota legislature amended the statute to create the free school meals program].

[Note: This MSBA/MASA model policy is drafted to be consistent for all grade levels. However, local school districts may vary the meal charge policy for elementary, middle, and high schools.]

[Note: School districts must follow appropriate debt collection practices when attempting to recover unpaid a la carte items or second meal charges.]

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of these procedures 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 second meals as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT

1. Willmar Public School's goal is to provide nutritious meals to students to promote healthy eating habits and enhance learning.
2. Willmar Public Schools will offer Breakfast and Lunch meals that meet state and federal guidelines.
3. If the school district receives school lunch aid under Minnesota Statutes §section 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.
4. The meal accounting system at the Willmar Public Schools is a PRE-PAID SYSTEM. All meals are paid for by depositing money into the meal account before meals are served.

III. PAYMENT OF MEALS

- A. When an account is in a negative status or has a balance of zero, no ala carte items or second entrées will be allowed to be charged to a student's account. If the purchase of ala carte items will make the student's account negative, the purchase will not be allowed. Students may use cash for snack bar or ala carte purchases as they wish.

Families can add money to their student's accounts through Parent Portal, at the school office, at the WEAC building, or via phone at 320-231-8516 or 320-231-8526. Payments can also be sent in the mail to:

Willmar Public Schools
ATTN: Food and Nutrition
611 5th St SW
Willmar, MN 56201

If the school district participates in the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch program and has an Identified Student Percentage below the federal percentage determined for all meals to be reimbursed at the free rate via the Community Eligibility Provision must participate in the free school meals program.

- 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 reimbursable meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meals balance. Second entrees and/or ala carte items are not a part of the reimbursable meal and may be removed if a student does not have adequate funds to cover the cost.
- E. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item.
- F. When money is placed into a meal account, negative balances will be paid off first before money is distributed within the household.

IV. LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES – NOTIFICATION

The school district will make reasonable efforts to notify families when meal account balances are low or fall below zero.

- A. **Low Balance:** Food and Nutrition Services considers a \$10.00 balance a “low balance”.
 - a. The FNS Business Coordinator will operate the automated calling and email systems as follows:
 - 1) Accounts with a negative balance are notified on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays
 - 2) Accounts with a \$.00-\$10.00 balance are notified on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
 - b. The FNS Business Coordinator will invoice all student meal accounts with a negative \$15.00 balance or more every month or as needed. Households may set up a payment plan if they are unable to pay off the entire balance.
- B. **Application for Educational Benefits:**
 - a. Families may fill out an application for educational benefits anytime during the school year. Meals will remain free, despite qualifications. Meal applications are distributed to all families in the district prior to the start of the school year. In addition, applications are available at the district office, via Infinite Campus Parent Portal, and on the district website at www.willmar.k12.mn.us.
 - b. If household income or size changes, families can submit a new application anytime during the school year.
 - c. When assistance is needed to resolve these requests, it will be provided by the principal, social worker, food and nutrition staff, or an interpreter upon request.
- C. **Notification of Account Status:**
 - a. All Sites:
 - 1. 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, or affixing stickers, stamps, or pins.
 - 2. Parents/guardians may call 231-8516 or 231-8526 on any school day and find out how much money is remaining in their account. Families can check their student's meal account balance via Infinite Campus Parent Portal.

V. UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

The District will follow all applicable state and federal laws related to the collections of debts by public entities in seeking to recover unpaid balances. Students will always be served a meal regardless of unpaid food service accounts. Adults will be required to have money in their account or cash on hand to receive a meal.

- 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 or 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.

When a household's student meal account reaches negative \$100.00 or below and no response is received from the household from the notification options listed in Section III, the below actions will be taken in the following order:

- A. The Food and Nutrition Services Business Coordinator will contact the building principal if no payment is received. The building principal or their designee will contact the family and review with them their responsibility to provide meals for their student.
- B. If no response is received by the building principal within two weeks, a certified letter will be sent to the household with unpaid meal account balances notifying them that the District will file a claim in Conciliation Court against the household as a means to retrieve unpaid balances. If the District files such a claim in Conciliation Court, it will also request that it be reimbursed by the household for any and all fees and costs it incurs in the case. At any point during or after this process of reaching the household, all students will continue to receive their reimbursable breakfast and lunch meals regardless of their account balance.
- C. If no response is received from the household within two weeks after the certified letter has been sent, the District will move forward with the Conciliation Court process.
- D. 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.
- E. 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

This policy and any pertinent supporting information will be provided in writing (i.e. mail, email, back to school packet, student handbook, etc.) by Food and Nutrition Services to:

- 1. All households at or before the start of the school year,
- 2. Students and families who transfer into the school district, at the time of enrollment, and
- 3. All school district personnel responsible for enforcing this policy.
- 4. The school district will post the policy on the school district's website, in addition to providing the required written notification above.
- 5. If the school district contracts with a third party for its meal services, it will provide the vendor with its school meal 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, 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

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