

## Unpaid Meal Charge and Debt Collection Procedure

### I. Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to establish consistent district practices for the provision of meals to students who have insufficient funds in their school meal accounts, as well as the collection of unpaid meal debt.

### II. General Statement of Procedure

- A. Mounds View Schools' goal is to provide nutritious meals to students to promote healthy eating habits and enhance learning, as well as maintain the financial integrity of the National School Breakfast and Lunch program and eliminate stigmatization of children who are unable to pay meal charges.
- B. Mounds View Public Schools will offer all students, Preschool to Grade 12, one breakfast and one lunch at no cost each day at school due to the Minnesota Free School Meals program. Nutrition Services offers breakfast and lunch meals at each school site that meet state and federal guidelines.
- C. Students may purchase additional foods, beverages, ala carte items, that are not included in the free reimbursable meal, when funds have been deposited into their meal account via cash, check or online payments
- D. Households may apply for educational benefits anytime during the school year. Applications are available to complete online at [www.moundsvIEWSchools.org/reducedfees](http://www.moundsvIEWSchools.org/reducedfees). Paper applications are available at the district office, all school offices. If household income or size of the family changes, families can apply for educational benefits anytime during the school year.
- E. The responsibility for ensuring that students can participate in meal service is that of the parents or guardians. The responsibility of the district is ensuring that students have a school meals program available to them.

### III. Charge Procedure

- A. All students will be provided a meal regardless of meal account status.
  - a. Once staff have placed a reimbursable meal on a tray or otherwise served the reimbursable meal to a student, the reimbursable meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official.
    - i. Alternate meals may not be provided to students as a result of a student's account status. Providing an alternate meal not on the scheduled menu violates a Minnesota law (Minn. Stat. § 124D.111) that requires respectful treatment of students regarding school lunch debt.

- b. Students who choose to purchase a carton of milk or an extra entrée without funds in their meal account will be charged. Mounds View Nutrition Services staff will not remove any extra entrée from a student's reimbursable meal tray, or prohibit a student from purchasing milk.
- c. Students who have negative account balances will not be allowed to charge ala carte items, such as bottle beverages, snacks etc., until the student has sufficient funds in their meal account.

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

Mounds View Schools utilizes several methods to notify households of negative meal balances. The following communications will be focused on parents rather than the students.

- A. Families can set up low balance email alerts and automated payments when their child's meal account balance reaches a certain amount via LINQ Connect (linqconnect.com)
- B. Mounds View Schools will send a weekly automated email to the parent/guardian when their secondary students meal account balance reaches -\$0.01 due to ala carte item(s) being charged to the meal account.
- C. School Administration
  - o It is important to recognize that everyone involved in the discussion at this level has the best interest of students in mind and that each family situation is unique.
  - o The School Administrative team will work together to develop a solution to unpaid school lunch accounts. A team approach is critical to identifying the scope of the debt as well as identifying ways to address the debt in a long-term, sustainable manner.

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

- A. The school district will make reasonable efforts to communicate with families to resolve the matter of unpaid charges
- B. The school district will make reasonable efforts to collect unpaid meal changes classified as delinquent.

#### **VI. Donations and account refunds**

- A. If a student is graduating or moving out of the District, families should complete a "Meal Account Request Form" if a positive balance remains in their student's account. Families may choose to refund the money, transfer to a sibling or donate to the Nutrition Services Angel Fund.
- B. This form may be found on the Nutrition Services webpage at [www.mvpschools.org/services/nutrition](http://www.mvpschools.org/services/nutrition)

- C. In addition to donations made on the “Meal Account Request Form”, donations are accepted year-round. Contributions can be made at any school. Funds will be deposited into the school Angel Fund. The Angel Fund is a fund designated for students experiencing financial hardship, or a need is presented to use Angel Fund money to clear a student’s negative account balance.
  - a. The decision to use Angel Fund money for student meal accounts is determined by the Nutrition Services District Manager and the Nutrition Services Supervisor. Angel Fund donation money is used only to support nutrition related costs for students.

## **VII. Accountability**

- A. This procedure will be distributed to households annually via the online annual update and the Nutrition Services website.
- B. This procedure will be distributed annually to school and district level staff responsible for enforcement such as nutrition services, principals and their designees, nurses and other district administrators as appropriate.
- C. Schools may choose to share information about the policy with families in other communication such as student handbooks, newsletters and/or in online portals.

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