

Adopted: 7/17/2017

Revised: _____

534 UNPAID MEAL CHARGES**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 any meal account has a negative balance in any amount, the elementary and/or high school office will send out an Instant Alert notification to parents. If a student's account has a negative balance of \$10 or more, students will be individually notified by the school office(s) and given a meal account statement or notice that indicates the amount of the negative balance. If a student's negative balance reaches \$20, a letter is sent home indicating the balance due and methods of how to make payments. Parents may add money to their children's account by mail, sending money designating to which account the funds are to be applied, by personally delivering funds to the office, or by adding money to lunch accounts through PaySchools online.
- 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. A student with an outstanding meal charge debt will be allowed to purchase a meal if the student pays for the meal when it is received.
- D. 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 (same as regular meal charge) will be charged to the student's account or otherwise charged to the student.
- E. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item.
- F. 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 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.

- B. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches \$10-\$20 or more. Families will be notified by Instant Alert, Balance Due Statement sent home with child, and/or letter mailed to parents, or both.
- 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 \$35 a student or \$50 per family, if not paid prior to a timeframe as determined by administrative discretion (quarterly, semester, or end of year), 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.

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.

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