SCHOOL MEALS POLICY

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 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. PAYMENT OF MEALS

A. All a la carte items or second meal purchases are to be prepaid before meal service begins. A student who does not have sufficient funds will not be allowed to charge a la carte items or a second meal until additional money is deposited in the student's account.

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 reimbursable 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has been placed on a student's tray or otherwise served to a student, the reimbursable meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meal balance.

E. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge an a la carte 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. When a student's account falls below zero, an automated phone call, text and/or

email will be made to the parent/guardian informing them of the low balance and that money will need to be put into the account. The food service meal system will notify the families three times during the week on Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday. Food service cashiers will verbally notify paid status students that "Your balance is low, and a payment is needed soon" when a student reaches a balance of less than $0.00. This process will continue until the student's balance becomes greater than $0.00.

C. 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 reimbursable meals, withdrawing a meal that has been served, announcing or listing students' names publicly, providing alternative meals not specifically related to dietary needs; providing non-reimbursable meals; or affixing stickers, stamps, or pins.

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 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.

C. If a student's account reaches past -$60.00 and is not paid prior to the end of the school year, a letter will be sent notifying the family the account will be turned over to a collection agency and the student account will be reset back to a $0.00 balance.

Negative balances of more than -$10.00 when a student leaves the School District will be turned over to the District Office for collection at the end of a school year. This includes graduating seniors.

In some instances, the school district does use a collection agency to collect unpaid school meal debts after reasonable efforts first have been made by the school district to collect the debt. 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.

E. 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.

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 will post this policy on the school district's website, or the website of the organization where the meal is served, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

C. If the school district contracts with a third party for its meal services, it will provide the vendor with its school meals 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 (School Meals Policies; 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

Cross References: None

Adopted: 05/16/11
Reviewed: 09/10/18
Revised: 08/20/14; 02/05/18; 08/05/19; 08/31/20; 11/17/20; 08/16/21; 11/06/23; 04/21/25