534 SCHOOL MEALS POLICY

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students receive healthy meals through the school district's Food and Nutrition Program and so 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 Food and Nutrition Program.

Adopted with revision from MSBA/MASA Model Policy 534, Orig. 2017. Rev. 11/17/20, 1/18/22, 8/8/23, 9/2/25

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II. PAYMENT OF MEALS

A. All a la carte items or second meals purchases are to be prepaid before meal service begins. Families may add money to School Meal Accounts in a number of convenient ways including: electronic payments, payments mailed to the Food & Nutrition office, and payments delivered to the school office or cafeteria. A student who does not have sufficient funds in a School Meal Account 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. Free School Meals Program

1. The free school meals program is created within the Minnesota Department of Education

2. Each school that 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.

3. Each 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.

4. Each school that participates in the free school meals program must:
    a. participate in the United States Department of Agriculture School Breakfast Program and the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program; and
    b. 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.

C. Once a meal has been placed on a student's tray or otherwise served to a student, the 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.

D. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item.

E. 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.

F. A student may purchase a second breakfast at the nonprogram price if the student has already selected a reimbursable breakfast.

G. A student may purchase a second lunch at the nonprogram price if the student has already selected a reimbursable lunch.

III. LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES – NOTIFICATION

A. The school district will make reasonable efforts to notify families of School Meal Account balances via the Parent Portal, US mail, letters sent home, e-mail or phone calls.

B. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches twenty dollars. Families will be notified via Parent Portal, monthly letters mailed home, email, or phone calls.

C. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school meals program, including, but not limited to, dumping meals, withdrawing a meal that has been served, announcing or listing students' names publicly, providing alternate meals not specifically related to dietary needs; providing nonreimbursable 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. School Meals Accounts with negative balances of more than $500 not paid prior to the end of the month, will be turned over to the superintendent or superintendent's designee for collection. 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 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.

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

Cross References: None