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## **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**

Students and staff have use of a meal account. When the balance reaches zero, a student may charge no more than two meals to this account. When an account reaches this limit, a student shall not be allowed to charge further meals or a la carte items until the negative account balance is paid. Staff members may not charge any items that will put their account into a negative balance.

- A. 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.
- B. 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.
- C. 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**

Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program.

#### **A. Student Accounts**

- 1. If a student's account balance is \$10.00 or less, an e-mail is sent to the student's parents to notify them of the current balance shortfall.

2. If the account balance falls below \$5.00, a second e-mail is sent to the student's parents to notify them of the current balance shortfall.
3. If the account balance is \$0 or less, the student may **not** charge ala carte items to their accounts.
4. If a student's account balance falls to or below \$0, the student is allowed two more meals. If the account balance is still below \$0 after two meals, the account will be referred to the District Office for further review.

B. Staff Accounts

1. If a staff member's account balance is \$10.00 or less, an e-mail is sent to the staff person to notify them of the current balance shortfall.
2. If the account balance falls below \$5.00, a second e-mail is sent to the staff person to notify them of the current balance shortfall.
3. If the account balance is \$0 or less, the staff member may **not** charge meals or ala carte items to their accounts.
4. If a staff member's account balance falls below \$0, the account will be referred to the District Office for further review.

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 \$10.00, not paid prior to the end of the month will be turned over to the District Office for review/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. § 220.08 (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