



534 UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

~~[[Note: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Policy Memorandum SP-46-2016 requires all School Food Authorities (i.e., school districts) operating federal school meal programs to have a written and clearly communicated system to address unpaid meal charges by July 1, 2017. USDA Policy Memorandum SP-23-2017 clarified that school districts could adopt a “policy” or “standard practice.” Whether adopted as policy or practice, the written document must explain how the school district will handle situations where students eligible to receive reduced-price or paid meals do not have money in their account or in hand to cover the cost of their meals at the time of service. The policy or standard practice must be implemented throughout the school district.]]~~

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 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. Students will always be allowed to charge meals. Families may bring in checks or cash to their particular school building or use the district web site to deposit funds for their student’s food service accounts.
- B. If the school district receives school lunch aid under ~~Minn. Stat. §~~ Minnesota Statutes section 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. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item.
- D. When a student uses the ala carte line, all ala carte purchases will be cash only.
- E. Once a meal has been placed on a student's tray or otherwise served to a student, the meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meals balance.

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 \$0 Families will be notified by automatic calling system and letters mailed home.
- 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 meals, withdrawing a meal that has been served, announcing or listing student's names publicly, or affixing stickers, stamps or pins.. ~~A meal will not be taken away from a student with an overdrawn account.~~

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 \$50, not paid by to the end of the school year will be turned over to the Director of Finance & Operations or 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 123V.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 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 may post the 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, ~~Subd. 4~~ (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