



## UNPAID MEAL CHARGES PROCEDURE

### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure 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 procedure 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. All meal purchases are to be prepaid before meal service begins. Students are issued a meal account when they enroll at Big Lake Schools. It is the parent or guardian's responsibility to make sure adequate funds are available in his or her student(s) account each day for breakfast and/or lunch. **For the 2021-2022 school year, all reimbursable meals are free. This does not include ala carte items, snack items, or extra servings.** It is recommended to always have at least a week's worth of meals in the student's account, if your student wishes to purchase non-reimbursable food items as outlined in the previous sentence. Meal payments can be made as follows:

1. Send cash or check with your child to school.
2. Mail or drop off cash or check to your child's school
  - Be sure to include your child's name, PIN #, and amount on envelope or check.
  - Cash or check payments may take 1-2 days to be credited to meal accounts.
  - Procedure for NSF (nonsufficient funds) checks:
    - When a check comes back from the bank the first time the check will be re-deposited by the Food Service Specialist. If the same check is returned for the second time, the Food Service Specialist will deduct the NSF check from the student's meal account.
    - The check will then be sent to the Food Service Director who will make contact with the parent or guardian. If the deduction in the student's account results in a negative balance, the procedures for deficit meal accounts will be followed, as outlined on pages 3 & 4.
    - The District reserves the right to charge parent(s) or guardian(s) a NSF check fee equivalent to the amount charged to the District.



3. Pay by credit card by logging into MySchoolBucks. A link is provided on the District's website under Food and Nutritional Services Department, Payment and Account Information. Through MySchoolBucks, a parent or guardian can:
    - Add money to meal accounts (minimum deposit of \$20.00)
    - Sign up for low balance alerts
    - View meal account transactions
    - Set up automatic payments
    - For technical assistance with MySchoolBucks, call 1-855-832-5226, Mon-Fri 7 am – 7 pm (Eastern Time)
  4. Transfer to/from family members please call or email Brenda Schake at (763) 262-5141, [b.schake@biglakeschools.org](mailto:b.schake@biglakeschools.org).
- B. The Big Lake school district receives school lunch aid under Minn. Statute 124D.111. Lunch is made available without charge to all participating students who qualify for free or reduced-price meals regardless of account balance. Families may apply for free and reduced meal benefits anytime during the school year; however, it is recommended a family apply before the first day of school. An application for meal benefits is available on the District's website, at each school building, or in the District Office. A parent or guardian may also apply online for free and reduced benefits by logging into their parent portal. A parent or guardian is responsible for meal charges **prior** to qualifying for meal benefits. **For the 21-22 school year, all reimbursable meals are free; however, families are still encouraged to complete an application for meal benefits and possibly qualify for other fee based discounts or P-EBT benefits.**
- C. No student will be denied a reimbursable meal, regardless of meal account balance. **If a student has a negative account balance, ala carte or "snack items" and extra servings are not allowed and cannot be purchased.**
- D. In addition, no alternate meals will be provided. **All students will receive reimbursable meals.**
- 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. With certain exceptions, funds may not be transferred between sibling accounts unless written permission is received from the parent or guardian. An email will suffice as written permission. Exceptions are as follows:
1. A graduating senior's positive balance will be transferred to a sibling at the end of the school year;
  2. A sibling's positive balance may be transferred to another sibling's negative balance to avoid collection proceedings;
  3. A phone call from a parent or guardian requesting transfers between sibling accounts will be allowed. The phone request will be documented in the student's account.



### 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. Procedures are as follows:
  - 1. Food Service Cashiers at point of sale will not give reminders of low or negative balances. Negative balances will be communicated via procedures described in III.B below. Communication of negative balances will be completed by District Office personnel.
  - 2. When a student’s meal account has reached a balance of positive \$5, an email reminder will be sent to parents via NutriKids system reminding them the meal account has reached a low level. The email reminder will be sent once a week.
- B. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches \$10. Notification procedures for negative balances are as follows:
  - 1. Twice a week, the Food Service Specialist will generate a report of all student accounts at negative \$10 or below. When a student’s meal account has reached a balance of negative \$10, an email reminder will be sent to parents or guardians via NutriKids system, reminding them the meal account has reached a low level. The email reminder will be sent twice a week to the parent or guardian.
  - 2. When a student’s meal account is \$25 in deficit, the Director of Food Service will attempt to call the parent(s) or guardian(s). Emails will continue to be sent twice a week by the NutriKids system as long as the balance is in a deficit.
  - 3. When a student’s meal account is \$50 in deficit, the Director of Business Services will send a letter to the family. The letter will encourage payment as soon as possible and/or completion of an Application for Meal Benefits. An application will be attached to the letter.
  - 4. For negative balances that continue to be greater than \$50, letters from the Director of Business Services will be sent monthly. In addition, the negative balance will be considered for referral to a collection agency following the end of the school year.
- 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. When appropriate, families will 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. Throughout the school year, invoices will be sent to families with deficit “stale” lunch accounts. A deficit “stale” lunch account is defined as unpaid meal charges prior to a student qualifying for free and reduced meal benefits **or** a student that has left the District with a negative lunch balance. Payment will be requested within 30 days. If no payment is received in 30 days, a second invoice will be sent with payment requested within 15 days. If no payment made after 45 days, the invoice will be referred to a collection agency.

Example wording on the invoice sent to the families may be as follows: “Although your student currently qualifies for free or reduced meal benefits, you are still responsible for meal charges **prior** to qualifying for meal benefits. Remit payment within 30 days to avoid further collection proceedings. Submit this payment with our invoice to the attention of the District Accountant”

More sample wording may be: “Your student is no longer enrolled at the Big Lake School District. You currently owe xxxx in unpaid meal charges. Remit payment within 30 days to avoid further collection proceedings. Submit this payment with our invoice to the attention of the District Accountant”

At the beginning of each month during the school year, the Food Service Specialist will review the student drop list for unpaid meal charges and refer the deficit meal accounts to the District Accountant for invoicing.

- D. At the end of the school year, regardless if the meal account is “stale” or not, unpaid meal charges that exceed a negative \$50 will be sent an invoice requesting payment within 30 days. If no payment is received in 30 days, a second invoice will be sent with payment requested within 15 days. If no payment made after 45 days, the invoice will be referred to a collection agency.

The District Accountant will remit the invoices to the collection agency after the Director of Business Services’ approval. The District’s collection agency allows another 45 days for payment before the unpaid balance is sent to a credit agency for impact to the family’s credit score.

- E. 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 UNPAID MEAL CHARGES PROCEDURES**

- A. This procedure and any pertinent supporting information shall be provided in writing to:
  - 1. all households at or before the start of each school year through emails to all households. For families that do not have email, this procedure will be mailed via U.S. mail;
  - 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 procedure.
- B. The school district will post the procedure on the school district's website, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

Reviewed:	July 20, 2017	July 22 <sup>nd</sup> , 2020
	April 16, 2018	July 26 <sup>th</sup> , 2021
	May 13 <sup>th</sup> , 2019	