

## 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 school meals as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

The parent/guardian of each student is responsible for ensuring their student has adequate funds in their school meal account each day.

### II. PAYMENT OF MEALS

- A. All meal purchases are to be prepaid before meal service begins. 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
    - a. Be sure to include your child's name, PIN #, and amount on envelope or check.
    - b. Cash or check payments may take 1-4 days to be credited to meal accounts.
  - 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.

A student who does not have sufficient funds will not be allowed to charge ala carte items until additional money is deposited in the student's account resulting in a positive account balance.

- B. If the school district receives school lunch aid under 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. 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.
- D. A student who has been determined to be eligible for free and reduced-price lunch always must be served a reimbursable meal even if the student has an outstanding debt.
- E. Once a meal has been placed on a student's tray or otherwise served to a student, the meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meals balance.
- 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. 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 meal 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.
- B. Families will be notified of low or outstanding negative balances as follows:
  - 1) When a student's meal account has reached a balance of positive \$5, an email reminder will be sent to parents reminding them the meal account has reached a low level. The email reminder will be sent once a week.
  - 2) When a student's meal account has reached a balance of negative \$10, an email reminder will be sent to parents or guardians, reminding them the meal account has reached a negative level. Weekly emails will continue as long as the meal account balance remains a negative \$10 or below.
  - 3) When a student's meal account is \$50 in deficit, a letter will be sent to the family. The letter will encourage payment as soon as possible and an Application for Meal Benefits will be attached to the letter.
  - 4) For negative balances that continue to be greater than \$50, letters 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, including, but not limited to, dumping meals, withdrawing a meal that has been served, announcing or listing students' names publicly, 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 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 prior to the end of the school year, will be turned over to the superintendent or superintendent's designee for collection. 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. Other 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.

**VI. ANGEL FUND**

The Big Lake School District maintains a donation account through its meal account software. Individuals and/or groups are able to donate to the Angel Fund. Funds are used to pay off negative meal account balances for families that accrued the balance before they qualified for free and reduced meals. Funds are also used for families experiencing temporary financial struggles that do not qualify for free and reduced price lunches as well as other unique circumstances.

***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***