

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

- A. ISD #721 (New Prague Area Schools) recognizes the parent/guardian's responsibility to provide breakfast and lunch for their children. Proper nutritional intake is essential for adequate learning to occur.
- B. The Nutrition Services Department utilizes a computerized Point of Sale system requiring pre-payments. Students may purchase meals when funds have been deposited into their personal account. Cash payments are always accepted and students selecting a la carte options can use either cash or positive lunch account funds.
- C. Meal account balances must be positive. The meal account works similar to a checking account. When a meal or item is purchased, the amount is deducted from the student's meal account. Individual student account information may be accessed online through the Parent Portal.
- D. Families may apply for free/reduced meals anytime during the school year and may apply multiple times during the school year if economic conditions in the family changes. Applications are provided to all families in the district prior to the school year. In addition, applications are available at the district office and online at the District website: <http://www.npaschools.org/district-site/lunch-benefits>.
- E. 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.
- F. The school district may provide an alternate meal that meets federal and state requirements to a student who does not have sufficient funds in the student's account or cannot pay cash for a meal. The school district will accommodate special dietary needs with respect to alternate meals. The cost of the alternative meal will be charged to the student's meal account.

- G. 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 be transferred between sibling accounts with permission from the parent or guardian.

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. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program.
- C. Individual student account balances are available on the Parent Portal. The Parent Portal may be accessed through the district's website. Statements may be requested from the Nutrition Services Director or Assistant via email or telephone anytime. The email address of the Director is on the District website.
- D. The Nutrition Services Program is a pre-payment program. Students are expected to have a positive balance in their meal account at the beginning of the year and during the course of the year if they wish to receive meals and pay for them through the automated Point of Sale system.
- E. The parent/guardian will be notified by Nutrition Services via email/phone call/text message (method based on parent notification preferences in parent portal) when an individual student account reaches a balance of \$10.00 or less. Parents can also sign up for smartphone app low meal account balances reminders.
- F. All students in grades K-12 will be notified in the meal line each day when their account is \$5.00 or less.

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. At the Middle School and High School a la carte items may be purchased cash-in-line if the student's meal account balance is negative.

- D. If a family’s total account balance (sum of each student in the household) is below -\$15.00 on December 1, March 1, and June 1, Nutrition Services staff will give account information to Transworld Systems for initial collection efforts. Parent/guardian should follow the instructions in the communications and make payments to New Prague Area Schools.
- E. If a family’s total account balance is not current after five communications from Transworld, the family’s account will be turned over to a collection agency. At this point the parent/guardian needs to work with the collection agency regarding making payments. If payments are not made during this collection time, credit ratings are affected.

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. § 220.8 (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

Adopted: 06/26/17
Reviewed:
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