

1st Reading 08/26/19, 2nd Reading 9/23/19, 3rd Reading/Adopted 10/28/19
Revised/ Adopted 2/24/2020

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

- A. Students have use of a meal account. Families can make payment to their students accounts at the district food service office, or online through the school district's website.
- B. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to keep a positive meal balance in their student(s) meal account or to pack a lunch from home.
- C. Parents are encouraged to check their student(s) meal account balance on the school website at www.lakeofthewoodsschool.org or contact the Food Service Office at 218-634-2510, Extension 1501. Students may also ask food service coordinator to check their account balance at any time.
- D. 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.
- E. Households may apply for free/reduced meals any time during the school year. Applications are mailed to all households in the school district prior to the school year and are included in enrollment packets. In addition, applications are available at the district office, main office, or online at www.lakeofthewoodsschool.org.
- E. 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 cost of the alternative meal \$1.00 will be charged to the student's account or otherwise charged to the student.

- F. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item or extra milk.
- G. Because of the possible demeaning or stigmatizing impact on a student, the school district will not refuse to serve a student meal. An alternate meal may be provided because of a negative account balance.
- H. If a parent or guardian chooses to send in one payment that is to be divided between sibling accounts, the parent or guardian may specify how the funds are to be distributed to the students' accounts. If not specified, payments will be divided equally towards each student's account. Funds may not be transferred between sibling accounts unless written or verbal permission is received 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. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches. Families will be notified by:
 - 1. When a student's meal account balance becomes negative, an automated phone call will be made via SchoolMessenger.
 - 2. Monthly invoices will be mailed at the end of each month for any account with a negative balance of \$10.00. A Free and Reduced Meal Application will also be mailed.
- C. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program. 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 \$150.00 per household, not paid prior to the end of the month will be turned over to the superintendent or superintendent's

designee for 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. The following scheduled may be employed:

1. The Food Service Coordinator will mail a letter indicating the unpaid amount and possible payment options to all account holders with a negative balance. A copy of the letter will be forwarded to the Accounts Payable Office.
2. If the district does not receive a response within 30 days, the Food Service Coordinator will mail a certified letter stating that it is the second notification along with a copy of the first letter. A copy of the letter will be forwarded to the Accounts Payable Office.
3. If the district does not receive a response within 60 days of the original letter, negative balances of \$300.00 or more per household may be turned over to conciliation court, given to a collection agency, or any other legal method permitted by law for collection.

D. Meal accounts will be reviewed annually

1. Inactive accounts with a negative balance and no activity within the last three (3) years may be written off. A list summarized by account will be provided to the Superintendent and approved by the school board.
2. Negative food service accounts of seniors must be paid prior to graduation.
3. If a student is no longer attending school and has a negative account balance, the account will be closed and may be submitted to a collection agency as determined by the superintendent.
4. Accounts with a positive account balance at the end of the school year and/or if a student leaves the district, will not be automatically refunded. A written or verbal request for a refund from the head-of-household must be submitted to the Food Service Coordinator. Inactive accounts with a positive balance and no activity with the last three (3) years may be transferred to the district's General Education Fund.

D. Except for professionals associated with companies or agencies that provide collection services, 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. § 220.8 (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