

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 employee, 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. If the student or family account is less than adequate to pay for breakfast and/or lunch, school staff will follow procedures listed below:
 - 1. All students will be provided a meal regardless of meal account status.
 - 2. Students in prek-12 will be allowed to choose meal options from the school meal program without restriction.
 - 3. If a student has a negative balance, they will not be allowed to charge ala carte items. Cash purchasing will be allowed.
- 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- E. Once a meal has been placed on a student's tray or otherwise served to a student, the meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meals balance.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. The school district will accommodate special dietary needs with respect to alternate meals. The cost of the alternative meal will be charged to student's account or otherwise charged to the student.

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. Families will be provided access to account status via Parent Vue, an online parent portal.

- B. Low Balance Notification:

- 1. The Food Service Department will initiate an automated low balance email message to households with \$15 or less in their account. Parents/Guardians will have the ability to adjust the threshold for earlier notification.
- 2. Food Service Department will encourage parents to complete the free/reduced-price meal application.

- C. Negative Balance:

- 1. When a family account reaches <\$.01>, households will be notified of negative balance in their family account. Automated calls will be placed after 6:15 p.m.
- 2. When a family account reaches <\$25.00>, households will receive a personal phone call from food service staff members with notification of negative balance.
- 3. When a family account reaches <\$50.00>, principals and/or counselors from each child's school will contact parents/guardians to learn more about family circumstances, to offer assistance to fill out free/reduced lunch applications or to assist in developing a plan to rectify status.
 - a. Beginning in grades 6-12, counselors or principals will meet with the student privately to discuss account status and meal options.
 - (1) A letter/invoice requesting payment will also be mailed to parents/guardians with the same information discussed with secondary student.
- 4. When a family account reaches <\$75.00>, the Director of Food and Nutrition Services will call parents/guardians to notify of potential credit bureau referral at balance of <\$100.00>. 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.

5. When a family account reaches, <\$100>, the Food Services Department will continue to notify family of account status via email, telephone and/or US postal mail.

D. 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 or 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 \$100, not paid prior to the end of January and the end of the school year may 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.

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 the policy on the school district’s website, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

Legal References:

Minn. Stat. §123B.37 (Prohibited Fees)

Minn. Stat. § 124D.111.subd. 4 (School Meals Policies; 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

Policy Adopted: 7/17/17

Policy Revised: 7/20/20, 1/24/22, 1/23/23

Alexandria Public Schools - No. 206

Alexandria, Minnesota