

Policy 534 SCHOOL MEALS

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students receive healthy and nutritious meals through the Northfield 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 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 keep confidential the identification of students with insufficient funds to pay for a la carte items or second meals as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

II. PAYMENT OF MEALS

- A. All students will have individual meal accounts with a separate 4-digit PIN (Personal Identification Number) for each student/user in the family to record individual meal purchases. When an account reaches zero or there is insufficient funds a student shall not be allowed to purchase a la carte items until the negative account balance is paid. Families may pay for meals by using cash, check or the district's online payment system. Payments may be made daily and sent to any school the student attends. Checks should be made out to Northfield Public Schools and must include the student's first and last name and personal identification number (PIN). Cash payments will be accepted in a sealed envelope with the student and parent's first and last name, PIN number, and the amount of payment written on the outside of the envelope. Payments may also be mailed to Northfield Public Schools, Child Nutrition Office, 201 Orchard Street South, Northfield, MN 55057. All schools have payment envelopes and collection boxes placed in the Child Nutrition area for receipt of payments. Each school collects and posts money daily into individual meal accounts. Money collected will be posted into the account as it is turned in or at least by 10:30 a.m. and again by 2:00 p.m. All other cash or check payments will be posted the following day.

See Negative Balance and NSF procedure for payment of meals.

B. Free School Meals Program

1. The free school meals program is created within the Minnesota Department of Education.
2. Each school that participates in the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch program and has an Identified Student Percentage at or above the federal percentage determined for all meals to be reimbursed at the free rate must participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision in order to participate in the free school meals program.
3. Each school that participates in the free school meals program must:
 - a. Participate in the United States Department of Agriculture School Breakfast Program and the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program; and

- b. Provide to all students at no cost up to two federally reimbursable meals per school day, with a maximum of one free breakfast and one free lunch.
 - c. A student who has been determined eligible for free and reduced-price meals must always be served a reimbursable meal even if the student has an outstanding debt.
- C. Once a reimbursable 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 meal balance.
- D. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge an a la carte item or a second meal.
- E. If a parent/guardian chooses to send in one payment that is to be divided between sibling accounts, the parent/guardian must specify how the funds are to be distributed to the students' accounts. Funds may not be transferred between sibling accounts unless written permission is received from the parent/guardian. Parents/guardians can request a transfer of funds by completing the [refund request form](#) found on the Child Nutrition Department website.
- F. A student may purchase a second breakfast at the nonprogram price if the student has already selected a reimbursable breakfast.
- G. A student may purchase a second lunch at the nonprogram price if the student has already selected a reimbursable lunch.

III. LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES NOTIFICATION AND UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- A. The 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, including, but not limited to, dumping meals, withdrawing a meal that has been served, announcing or listing students' names publicly, providing alternative meals not specifically related to dietary needs; providing nonreimbursable meals, or affixing stickers, stamps, or pins.
- C. The 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.
- D. The 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.

- E. Negative balances of more than \$30, not paid prior to the *end of the school year*, will be turned over to the superintendent or superintendent's designee for collection. In some instances, the 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. 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.
- F. The school district may not enlist the assistance of non-school district employees, such as volunteers, to engage in debt collection efforts.
- G. The superintendent or designee will develop procedures for collecting unpaid meal charges and notification of low or negative balances. [Refer to negative balance and NSF procedure guidelines.](#)
- H. The 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.

IV. 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.
 - 3. All district personnel who are responsible for enforcing this policy.
- B. The district will post this policy on the district's website in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

Policy 534 School Meals

Adopted: 01.13.2020; Statutory Update: 02.14.2022, 07.10.2023, 08.11.2025

Board of Education

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 659

Northfield, Minnesota

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