

Policy 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. 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 Revtrak 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, 1400 Division 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 am and again by 2:00 pm. All other cash or check payments will be posted the following day.

See Negative Balance and NSF procedure for payment of meals.

- B. 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.
- C. The school district does not provide alternate meals, but will allow a student with an outstanding meal charge debt to purchase a reimbursable meal.
- D. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge an a la carte item.
- 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. Funds may not be transferred between sibling accounts unless written permission is received from the parent or guardian.

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

- 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. 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.
- D. 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.
- E. The school district may not deny any student the opportunity to participate in graduation ceremonies or other commencement activities due to unpaid meal charges.
- F. Negative balances of more than \$30, not paid prior to *end of the school year*, 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.
- G. The school district may not enlist the assistance of non-school district employees, such as volunteers, to engage in debt collection efforts.
- H. 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.](#)

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; and
 - 3. all school district personnel who are responsible for enforcing this policy.

- B. The school district shall post the policy on the school district's website, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

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Adopted: 01.13.2020

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
Minn. Op. Atty. Gen. 169j (May 14, 2019) (*Letter to Ricker*)