

534 UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

[Note: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Policy Memorandum SP 46-2016 requires all School Food Authorities (i.e., school districts) operating federal school meal programs to have a written and clearly communicated system to address unpaid meal charges by July 1, 2017. USDA Policy Memorandum SP 23-2017 clarified that school districts could adopt a “policy” or “standard practice.” Although this document is styled as a “policy,” school districts may establish and implement a set of written procedures instead of a policy, provided that the written document explains how the school district will handle situations where students eligible to receive reduced-price or paid meals do not have money in their account or in hand to cover the cost of their meals at the time of service. The policy or standard practice must be implemented throughout the school district.]

[Note: This MSBA/MASA model policy is drafted to be consistent for all grade levels. However, local school districts may vary the meal charge policy for elementary, middle, and high schools.]

[Note: School districts must follow appropriate debt collection practices when attempting to recover 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 meal purchases are to be prepaid before meal service begins. Payments can be made online via debit or credit card at www.paypams.com. Contact the food services director for information on how to get an account set up for your student(s). Cash or check payments can be made to the school directly. Elementary school students can turn cash or check into their teacher or the school office. High School students can turn cash or check in to food services or the school office. Checks should be made payable to Crookston Public Schools.

Students have use of a meal account and must use their meal account when purchasing a meal or extra item, even if the student is paying with cash. When the balance reaches zero, a student may charge no more than \$50.00 to this account of regular student meals or first milk. When an account reaches this limit, a student shall not be allowed to charge further meals until the negative account balance is paid. Extra items, which include a la carte, extra entrées, extra servings, and extra milks are not allowed to be charged with a balance of zero or below.

- B. If the school district receives school lunch aid under Minn. Stat. § 124D.111, it must make lunch and breakfast 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. 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 account or otherwise charged to the student.
- E. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge extra items. Extra items include a la carte items, extra entrées, extra servings, and extra milks.
- 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 student accounts unless permission is received from the parent or guardian to the food services director.

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 via letter or e-mail of an outstanding negative balance once the negative balance reaches \$4.00. Families will be notified by phone call once the negative balance reaches \$20.00.
- 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.
- C. The school district may not enlist the assistance of non-school district employees, such as volunteers, to engage in debt collection efforts.
- D. Exceptions can be made at the discretion of the school district, only after an Application for Educational Benefits is properly filled out by the parent or guardian. The parent or guardian must fully cooperate with food services in order for any exceptions to be made regarding meal payment debt.

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.

VI. UNPAID MEALS FOR STAFF/FACULTY

- A. Any lunch debt will be paid in full with the last payroll check no later than June 12 of each school year.

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