

SCHOOL MEALS POLICY

[Note: In 2021, the Minnesota legislature amended Minnesota Statutes, [section 124D.111](#), to require that Minnesota school districts that participate in the national school lunch program adopt a school meals policy. In 2023, the Minnesota legislature amended the statute to create the free school meals program].

[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 a la carte items or second 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. Each student will be assigned a Personal Identification Number (PIN) which is to be used for all charges. The PIN will be used for all transactions. 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 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 a la carte items or second meal purchases are to be prepaid before meal service begins. A student who does not have sufficient funds will be allowed to charge meals although they will not be allowed to charge a la carte items

or a second meal until additional money is deposited in the student's account. A la carte items may be purchased with cash.

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 below the federal percentage determined for all meals to be reimbursed at the free rate via the Community Eligibility Provision must participate in the free school meals program.
3. 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.
4. Each school that participates in the free school meals program must:
 - (1) participate in the United States Department of Agriculture School Breakfast Program and the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program; and
 - (2) 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.

D. Meal Charging Procedure

1. Students will use their own PIN to make a meal and ala cart purchases. This will ensure the proper charges to each Meal Account also, the proper claiming to the Minnesota Department of Education. It is the responsibility

of each student to enter their own PIN at the time of transaction. Younger children will be given their PIN before school to start the memory process and the staff will also provide learning of this PIN. The Food accounting system is a prepaid system, meaning that no Ala carte charging is allowed. Ala cart items are paid for by depositing money into the Meal Account before meals are served.

- a. Breakfast and lunch for each student will be Free. Provided they have all the meal components.
- b. Other purchases that may be deducted from the account include extra milk, second helpings, and ala carte items using the use of their PIN.
- c. It is the responsibility of the parent or guardian to ensure there is sufficient money in the Meal Account before mealtime.
- d. Funds can be deposited in the Meal Account by bringing money to the offices, paying the Food Service clerk before 10:00 a.m. or paying on-line via "Parent Portal Account."

2. Instructions on How to Make Payment via Parent Portal

- a. Visit www.nls.k12.mn.us
- b. Choose Parents/Students
- c. Then select, Parent Portal
- d. When logged into Parent Portal, choose "Food Service", then "Pay"
- e. Fill in the amount for each student, a one-dollar fee is automatically added.
- f. When completed, choose "Add to Cart."
- g. Click on the "Shopping Cart"
- h. Select "Submit Payment"
- i. You must set up a payment method, as payment choice. Click add to add a payment method. Enter information and save. Continue steps until you receive a confirmation number, if you do not receive a confirmation number your payment was not successful.

3. Account Balance Procedure

- a. The School Food Service considers a \$10 account balance a "low balance." Each day that the account balance is lower than \$10 the Messenger system will automatically call the students' home that evening to report a low account balance.

- b. When a lunch account reaches a negative balance, the following will occur: Messenger will contact the parent to give notification of a negative account balance. In addition, every Tuesday and Thursday direct messages will be sent by our FNS Accountant/Clerk.
 - c. Meal Account Statements are available on the Infinite Campus “Parent Portal.” If you wish to receive a printed or email copy please contact our FNS Accountant/Clerk at 320-354-2252 ext. 2607.
 - d. All Families will be strongly encouraged to apply for the benefits offered by the USDA free/reduced meal program. For an application for this program visit the [NLS Website](#).
 - 4. For more information, please contact the FNS Accountant/Clerk at the NLS School District by calling 320-354-2252 ext. 2607.
- 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 meal balance.
- F. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge an ala carte item.
- G. 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 will be transferred between sibling accounts unless the FNS Accountant/Clerk is notified otherwise by the parent or guardian.
- H. Wildcat Cafe Fund – The Wildcat Cafe Fund is a food and nutrition account to help support students who may need temporary help to pay for debt owed. However, it will use the Wildcat Cafe Fund to assist families pay for meal account debt as long as there is money in this fund.

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 -\$0.01. Families will be notified by home phone, cell phone, or e-mail. Personal preferences General and Food Service must be marked in the Parent Portal. If you need assistance, please contact the FNS Accountant/Clerk.
- C. 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. A meal will not be taken away from a student with an overdrawn account.

IV. Refunds

- A. All monies stay in the student's meal account and will follow them from year to year, whether the student goes to the elementary, middle school, or high school.
- B. If the student leaves the district, parents must submit a request for a refund in writing or may verbally contact the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Accountant/Clerk. Upon receipt of the request, the FNS Accountant/Clerk will refund the balance and close the account. A refund slip with the refund request attached will be forwarded to Accounts Payable for processing and payment.
- C. At the end of the school year, the FNS Accountant/Clerk will run a report listing graduating seniors with an account balance of more than \$5.00. The list will be reviewed to determine if the graduate has siblings in the district. If so, FNS Accountant/Clerk will transfer any remaining funds to the siblings account in June prior to the end of the fiscal year. The transfer will be made between siblings and a report attached to the list. If there are no siblings, a request will be mailed to the household to see if they would like to donate their remaining funds to the Food Service Student Activity Account or have the funds refunded. A voucher request for the refund will be prepared by the FNS Accountant/Clerk and submitted to Accounts Payable for processing and payment. A second notice will also be mailed to all households, as needed.

- D. The FNS Accountant/Clerk will ensure that the student account has been closed.
- E. Accounts Payable will process voucher requests upon receipt.
- F. Variations to this policy will be brought to the attention of the Director of Food and Nutrition Services. Changes to this policy will be presented to the school board for consideration and final approval.

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 not paid will be turned over to the superintendent or superintendent's designee for collection. In some instances, the school district does use a collection agency to collect unpaid school meal debt 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.
- 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 Account 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 this policy on the school district's website, or the website of the organization where the meal is served, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.
- C. If the school district contracts with a third party for its meal services, it will provide the vendor with its school meals policy. The school district will ensure that any third-party provider with whom the school district enters into either an original or modified contract after July 1, 2021, adheres to the school district's school meals policy.

Legal References: [Minn. Stat. § 123B.37 \(Prohibited Fees\)](#)
[Minn. Stat. § 124D.111](#)(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](#)

Cross References: None

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