

534.00 UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

I. PURPOSE

Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) believes that well-nourished students are better equipped to learn. The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students receive healthy and nutritious meals through the SPPS Child Nutrition Program and that school district employees, families, and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding meal charges. The policy seeks to eliminate stigmatization of students who are unable to pay for school meals, as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

II. PAYMENT OF MEALS

- A. Each year, all families should complete an Application for Education Benefits/Free or Reduced Priced Meals.
 - 1. Families that receive a letter prior to September 1st confirming that they are directly certified to receive free meal benefits do not need to complete an application.
 - 2. The application will be made available to families in multiple ways such as by mail and/or electronic distribution prior to the start of the school year, at the school's main office, Nutrition Services' website, and by request to Nutrition Services.
 - 3. Families seeking assistance in completing the application may contact Nutrition Services or the school's main office.
- B. Funds can be added to a student's meal account using cash, check, credit card, or debit card. The process for making payments can be found on the SPPS Nutrition Services website or by inquiring at the school's main office.
- C. All students will be provided a meal regardless of meal account status.
 - 1. The district is not legally required to serve meals to students who do not qualify for free or reduced-price meals when their meal account has a negative balance. However, SPPS believes it is in the best interest of the entire school community when every student receives a nutritious meal.
 - 2. Students approved for free or reduced-price meals, including students enrolled in the Community Eligibility Provision, will be provided a meal even if the student has a negative account balance.
 - 3. Full pay students who have money "in hand" to pay for the current meal will be provided a meal even if the student has a negative account balance.
 - 4. If a student has a negative account balance, the response process as described in Section IV below will be carried out. If

the parent/guardian fails to pay the unpaid meal charges after reasonable attempts have been made through this process, the student may receive an alternative meal.

5. Alternative meals must be served in a discrete and respectful manner.
6. No ala carte items will be sold to students unless there is sufficient funds in the student's meal account to cover the costs of the items.
7. Under no circumstances may a meal be taken away from a student after the student has received it.

III. NOTIFICATION OF LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES

- A. The following steps are taken to notify parents/guardians when a student's account balance is low or negative:
 1. For elementary school students, when the account has reached a negative balance of approximately two lunch meal charges, a notice will be given to the student's teacher to be sent home in the student's backpack.
 2. For all SPPS students,
 - i. When the account has reached a low balance of approximately five lunch charges, an automated phone call will be sent to the parent or guardian.
 - ii. When the account has reached a negative balance of approximately five lunch meal charges, the Office of Nutrition Services will mail a letter to the parent or guardian in a discrete, non-identifiable manner.
 - iii. When the account balance has reached approximately ten lunch meal charges, the school's principal will be notified. School staff will then engage with the parent or guardian to evaluate their needs, provide assistance, and request payment.

IV. UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- A. Efforts for payment of negative student meal account balances will not demean or stigmatize any student.
- B. The district will make reasonable efforts to communicate with families to resolve unpaid charges. Families will be encouraged to apply for free and reduced-price meals for their children. Families who have previously completed an application, but have since faced significant changes, such as birth of a child, income changes, etc. may reapply. Families who are experiencing difficulty paying for lunch may contact Nutrition Services to set up a payment plan.
- C. The school district will make reasonable efforts to collect unpaid meal charges; however, when efforts do not result in payment, the unpaid meal charges will be charged back to the school to cover the unpaid charges from the school's budget.

- D. The district may not enlist the assistance of non-school district employees, such as volunteers, to engage in debt collection efforts.

V. **COMMUNICATION OF POLICY**

- A. This policy and supporting information will be provided in writing (i.e. mail, email, back-to-school packet, student handbook, staff training, etc.) to:
 - 1. All families 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 policy will also be posted on the District's website.

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

CROSS REFERENCES:

Policy 533.00 – Wellness