

UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

534

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I. PURPOSE

- A. 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 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 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. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

- A. Zumbrota-Mazeppa Public Schools' goal is to provide nutritious meals to students to promote healthy eating habits and enhance learning as well as maintain the financial integrity of the National School Breakfast and Lunch program and eliminate stigmatization of children who are unable to pay meal charges.
- B. It is the policy of Zumbrota-Mazeppa Schools to offer breakfast and lunch meals that meet state and federal guidelines.
- C. A Point of Sale (POS) software system is used for the school lunch program.
 - i. Each student will have his/her own individual Student Account and will have an individual account number.
 - ii. Check and cash deposits can be received at the individual student's school and with the District Food Service Office. Checks should be made payable to the Zumbrota-Mazeppa School District.
 - iii. Separate checks should be written for students at separate schools. To ensure credit to the proper account, the student's full name should be written on the check on the memo line. The minimum deposit must be \$20.
 - iv. If sending cash with a student, place in a sealed envelope, along with the student's name and lunch account number. *We are not responsible for lost, unidentified, or stolen cash. The minimum deposit must be \$20.*
 - v. If money needs to be transferred from one sibling's account to another, then a note or phone call from home is needed. The only exception will be if a student's sibling has money that can be transferred in order to avoid receiving an alternative meal.

- vi. Students must have money deposited in their lunch account in order to purchase extra entrees or extra milk, regardless of eligibility status (paid, free, or reduced). This is also applied to ala carte.
 - vii. We cannot make change for cash at the schools so please utilize the lunch account for all purchases.
 - viii. Parents/guardians can check their account balance by calling the Food Service Office at 507-732-1417 or by creating a login through the Infinite Campus Parent Portal to view the paperless version of the lunch account.
 - ix. 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. 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.
- E. Families may apply for free/reduced-price meal benefits anytime during the school year. Meal applications are distributed to all families in the district prior to the student's first day of classes. In addition, applications are available in the primary, elementary, middle/high school, and the district offices, the school webpage, and the food service office during school hours. If household income or size change, families can apply for meal benefits anytime during the school year.

III. CHARGE POLICY/NOTIFICATION OF ACCOUNT STATUS

- A. If the student or family account has insufficient funds to pay for breakfast and/or lunch meals, the following policies will be enforced:
- i. The lunchroom computer will give the cashier a student balance. When the student's individual account is at \$10, the student will be reminded that they need to bring money for lunch. No other notification will be given to the student.
 - ii. Parents will receive reminder e-mails and text messages from the school indicating a low account balance starting with a \$20 balance. These notifications will be sent on Monday's, Wednesday's, and Friday's as needed. Once the student account reaches negative \$5 the emails and text messages stop.
 - iii. Once the student account reaches negative \$5, Lunchtime Solutions will call parents/guardians to discuss the account balance. The purpose of the call is to come up with a plan to reconcile the account and may include:
 - 1. A plan for the parent to send payment by a specific date.
 - 2. A plan for the parent to make payments on specific dates.
 - 3. A plan to connect the school social worker with the family if they are unable to pay. Lunchtime Solutions will communicate this need to the school social worker.

If after 4 unsuccessful attempts to make verbal contact, Lunchtime Solutions will refer the family to step IV.
 - iv. If payment is not received by the indicated date in step III, Lunchtime Solutions will send out a letter from the school district laying out additional options for the family. The options include the student's/Families current balance, a Free

Meal Application, the school social workers name and contact information, and a date in which the social worker will turn the issue over to collections or complete a Free Meal application for the student so the student can continue to eat at school.

- v. If communication is not received by the date indicated on the letter the school social worker will assess the family need and make a decision to refer the family to collections or fill out a Free Meal Application for the family. If a Free Meal application is completed the family will be notified through mailing that they are receiving this meal benefit.

- B. Assistance from county social services may be requested from the school social worker for possible educational neglect when the above procedures are unsuccessful.

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 may not enlist the assistance of non-school district employees, such as volunteers, to engage in debt collection efforts.
- C. After thirty (30) days of a negative balance, a follow up call to county social services will be made. County social services are required to investigate claims of “educational neglect” when contacted by a school district. It is the position of the Zumbrota-Mazeppa School District that families that can afford to make payments yet are refusing to provide their child with basic needs such as a school lunch, are engaging in “educational neglect”.
- D. The district may zero out lunch balances for students if donations are received for this purpose. In this case, the write off is recorded as an expense for the district and the donations are recorded as offsetting revenue.

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:
 - i. All households at or before the start of each school year;
 - ii. Students and families who transfer into the school district, at the time of enrollment; and
 - iii. All school district personnel who are responsible for enforcing this policy.
- B. The school district will post the 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