

## 534 UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

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### I. PURPOSE

The purpose of these procedures 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. GENERAL STATEMENT

1. Willmar Public School's goal is to provide nutritious meals to students to promote healthy eating habits and enhance learning.
2. Willmar Public Schools will offer Breakfast and Lunch meals that meet state and federal guidelines.
3. The meal accounting system at the Willmar Public Schools is a PRE-PAID SYSTEM. All meals are paid for by depositing money into the meal account before meals are served. When money is placed into a meal account, negative balances will be paid off first before money is distributed within the household.

### III. LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES

1. **Low Balance:** Food and Nutrition Services considers a \$10.00 balance a "low balance".
  - a. **Elementary Students**  
If the money remaining in the account falls below \$10.00, a low balance invoice will be sent home with the student.
  - b. **Secondary Students**  
If the money remaining in the account falls below \$10.00, a secondary student will be reminded on the food service line that the balance is low.
  - c. The FNS Support Systems Coordinator will operate the automated calling and email systems as follows:
    - 1) Accounts with a negative balance are notified on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays
    - 2) Accounts with a \$.00-\$10.00 balance are notified on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
  - d. The FNS Support Systems Coordinator will invoice all student meal accounts with a negative \$15.00 balance or more every other week. Households may set up a payment plan if they are unable to pay off the entire balance.
2. **Free and Reduced Students for all schools:**
  - a. Families may apply for free or reduced meal benefits anytime during the school year. Meal applications are distributed to all families in the district prior to the start of the school year. In addition, applications are available at the district office, via Infinite Campus Parent Portal, and on the district website at [www.willmar.k12.mn.us](http://www.willmar.k12.mn.us). If household income or size changes, families can apply for meal benefits anytime during the school year.
  - c. When assistance is needed to resolve these requests, it will be provided by the principal, social worker, and FNS staff.
3. **Notification of Account Status:**
  - a. **Elementary Sites:**  
When an account falls below the necessary amount to pay for a meal, the student's account will be debited and the site secretary will print a low/negative balance invoice, forwarded by the FNS Support Systems Coordinator, and will place it in the teacher's box for it to be taken home by the student to inform the parent/guardian that money is needed in their student's meal account.

**b. Secondary Sites:**

When an account falls below the necessary amount to pay for a meal, the student's account will be debited and the Cashier will verbally notify the student that money needs to be placed in their account and hand them a note stating that money is needed in the account.

**c. All Sites:**

- 1) When an account is in a negative status, no ala carte items or second entrees will be allowed to be charged. If a student has selected these items, they will be removed from the student's tray.
- 2) Parents/guardians may call 231-8526 on any school day and find out how much money is remaining in their account. Families can check their student's meal account balance via Infinite Campus Parent Portal.

#### **IV. COLLECTION OF UNPAID DEBT**

The District will follow all applicable state and federal laws related to the collections of debts by public entities in seeking to recover unpaid balances.

Students eligible for free or reduced-priced meals will always be served a meal regardless of unpaid food service accounts. When a student has "cash in hand" to pay for a meal, the student will be served a meal regardless of unpaid meal accounts.

When a household that is ineligible for free meals allows the paid student's meal account to go to \$.00 or below and no response is received from the household from the notification options listed in Section III, the below actions will be taken in the following order:

1. The Food and Nutrition Services Support Systems Coordinator will contact the building principal if no payment is received. The building principal or their designee will contact the family and review with them their responsibility to provide meals for their student.
2. A certified letter will be sent to the household with unpaid meal account balances notifying them that the District will file a claim in conciliation Court against the household as a means to retrieve unpaid balances. If the District files such a claim in conciliation Court, it will also request that it be reimbursed by the household for any and all fees and costs it incurs in the case.
3. If no response is received from the household within two weeks after the Conciliation Court judgement, elementary students will always be fed, along with students who are eligible for free or reduced price meals; the Middle and High School students/households will be required to provide their own meals until the meal debt is paid.
4. If none of the above methods of collection are effective and/or no consistent progress is shown to pay off the unpaid meal balance, the following options will be considered:
  - a. A Middle and High School Student will not be able to start a sport and/or an extra-curricular activity,
  - b. A Middle and High School Student will not be able to attend a school dance,
  - c. A Senior High Student will not be able to attend Prom,
  - d. A Senior High Student Parking Pass will not be issued,
  - e. Other options as deemed appropriate by the school district.

#### **V. COMMUNICATION OF POLICY**

This policy and any pertinent supporting information will be provided in writing (i.e. mail, email, back to school packet, student handbook, etc.) by Food and Nutrition Services to:

1. All households at or before the start of the school year,
2. Students and families who transfer into the school district, at the time of enrollment, and
3. All school district personnel responsible for enforcing this policy.
4. The school district will post the policy on the school district's website, in addition to providing the required written notification above.

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**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