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534 UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

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: School districts must follow appropriate debt collection practices when attempting to recover unpaid meal charges.]

I. PURPOSE

The School District of La Crescent-Hokah believes that a healthy, well-nourished, active child is better prepared to learn. Proper nutritional intake is essential for adequate learning to occur. The School District of La Crescent-Hokah believes all children need access to nutritious meals that meet or exceed federal standards.

The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent unpaid meal balance procedure for the School District of La Crescent-Hokah.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPY

- A. The School District of La Crescent-Hokah recognizes the parent/guardian’s responsibility to provide breakfast and lunch for their child(ren). Proper nutritional intake is essential for adequate learning to occur. Families not meeting federal income guidelines for free meals are expected to pay the cost of meals consumed by their child(ren).
- B. The School Nutrition Department strives to produce quality meals at a reasonable cost. Achieving this goal is in part dependent upon generating the financial resources necessary to fund the school meal program. Primary funding sources for the school meals program are the Federal government and meal prices charged to families. Federal funds cover the cost of meals for children that come from households with income below defined levels.

- C. The School District of La Crescent-Hokah does not support the concept of higher meal prices so that some families can go without paying for their child(ren)'s meals. Therefore, the district will require timely and full payment for meals purchased and collection of all outstanding payments due. When each family pays for the meals consumed by their child(ren) everyone pays their appropriate share.
- D. Households may apply for free/reduced meals anytime during the school year. To help families in need, notification of the Meal Benefit (Free and Reduced) Application process will be made prior to the beginning of the school year. In addition, applications are available on the district website, at each school, and at the district office. Reminders of the Meal Benefit (Free and Reduced) Program will be provided by the School Nutrition Department, school guidance counselors, school psychologists and other professionals as they become aware of a potential need.

III. PAYMENT OF MEALS

[Note: Payment systems and procedures will likely vary from school district to school district. The school district should select one of the following options and delete the remaining options.]

- A. Meal payments are accepted through the district website via Family Access, through the US Mail or brought directly to the school. Parents and guardians may access all meal account statuses and activities on the parent portal, Skyward Family Access.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Accounts require prepayment. Accounts with a negative balance will be notified daily via Skylert or email from Skyward. Statements will be sent home with your child, emailed, or by a placing a phone call. A regular meal will be served, but parents who choose not to make payments will be asked to send a bag lunch with their child.

MIDDLE SCHOOL: Accounts require prepayment. Students may be given a two day grace period (not to exceed \$7.00) before meals are stopped. Accounts with a negative balance will be notified daily via Skylert or email from Skyward.

HIGH SCHOOL: Accounts require prepayment. Charging is not allowed.

- B. If the school district receives school lunch aid under Minn. Stat. § 124D.111, it must make lunch 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. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge any a la carte items.

- E. 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 sibling accounts unless permission is received from the parent or guardian.

IV. 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 any outstanding negative balance. All families will be notified by Skylert, e-mail, and, in the case of elementary students, reminders may be sent home
- C. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program.

V. 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. The School District of La Crescent-Hokah reserves the right to take steps deemed necessary to collect overdue payments. These actions may include: turning the outstanding balance over to a collection agency, small claims court, revocation of charging privileges, or other actions as deemed necessary.
- D. The school district may not enlist the assistance of non-school district employees, such as volunteers, to engage in debt collection efforts.

VI. COMMUNICATION OF POLICY

- A. This policy and any pertinent supporting information and procedures shall be provided in writing 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 the policy and procedure on the school district's website, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

Reference: School District of La Crescent-Hokah Unpaid Meal Balance Charge Procedure

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