

Hopkins Unpaid Meal Charge and Debt Collection Action Plan

I. Purpose

This action plan is intended to establish consistent district practices for the provision of meals to students who have insufficient funds in their school meal account and to regulate the collection of unpaid meal debt.

II. General Statement of Action Plan

- A. The goal of Hopkins Public Schools is to provide nutritious meals to students to promote healthy eating habits, enhance learning and maintain the financial integrity of the National School Breakfast and Lunch program. It is also important to eliminate the overt identification of children/families who are unable to pay meal charges.
- B. It is the policy of Hopkins Public Schools to offer a USDA reimbursable breakfast and lunch to every child.
- C. Every child is automatically assigned a unique 6 digit PIN number to use to purchase a meal. Money can be deposited into their account with:
 - cash
 - check
 - credit card or ACH transaction through the Infinite Campus Parent Portal
- D. Families may apply for free/reduced-price meal benefits anytime during the school year. Children living in foster homes and students whose families have been temporarily displaced and are living with friends or relatives may also qualify. Meal applications are available;
 - online on the Hopkins Public Schools Website
 - at the Hopkins Public Schools Nutrition Office, 1001 Highway 7, Hopkins, MN 55305, Room #101, between 8:00AM - 4:00PM, Monday - Friday
 - with the student enrollment packet given to families enrolling new children in the district
 - upon request, mailed or emailed, at any time

III. Charging on Accounts

- If a student that is eligible for **PAID** meals has insufficient funds to pay for breakfast and/or lunch:
 - Elementary and junior high students will always be given a reimbursable breakfast or lunch. If their account is negative, the negative balance will continue to increase with each meal that is served.
 - Hopkins High School students, grades 10-12, will be allowed to charge up to \$10.00 negative (approximately 3 meals). Thereafter, an alternate reimbursable breakfast or lunch will be issued, at no additional charge, until the account is paid in full.
 - When a high school student eligible for PAID meals has “cash in hand” to buy a meal, the student will be served regardless of unpaid balance. The “cash in hand” will not be applied towards past due balances.
 - No ala carte items (i.e. milk) will be sold to any student with a negative balance.
- If a student that is eligible for **FREE/REDUCED** meals has insufficient funds to pay for breakfast and/or lunch, a meal will always be served a meal regardless of an unpaid meal account balance.
 - No ala carte items (i.e. milk) will be sold to any student with a negative balance..

IV. Notification of Account Status

- A. Families can check their child's meal account balance
 - Online via Infinite Campus Parent Portal
 - Call the Nutrition Office or individual school cashier to inquire about their child's account balances
 - Cashiers will use discretion to notify students about low balances in the lunch line
- B. Elementary school cashiers will send negative balance letters through the classroom weekly folder that is sent home in your child's backpack.
- C. Cashiers will email or call parents weekly requesting a payment when a child's meal account becomes negative.
- D. Cashiers will encourage parents to complete the free/reduced price meal application. Spanish, Somali and Hmong Interpreters are available, upon request, to assist with filling out the application.
- E. An automated calling service will send both emails and phone calls on the following schedule:
 - Mondays and Thursdays at 2:15 PM when a full pay elementary or jr high student account drops below \$8.00.
 - Mondays and Thursdays at 2:15 PM when a full pay high school student account drops below \$10.00.
 - On the 2nd Tuesday of each month, at 2:15 PM, to all Free/Reduced accounts that have a negative balance.

V Collection of Unpaid Meal Debt

If an account continues to be negative, the following collection actions may be taken:

- The cashier will work with the Student Nutrition Administrative office and the building principal, or their designee, to contact the household and review with the parent their responsibility to provide meals for their student.
- Assistance from the school social worker may be requested by the cashier or the School Nutrition Director.
- Payment arrangements may be offered with the understanding that the parent/guardian will remain in contact with either the cashier or nutrition office should any changes be necessary.
- Assistance from the county social services may be requested by the school if parents refuse to provide meals or pay for school prepared meals for their children.
- The expectation is all fees owed to the district will be paid in full on the last day the student will be attending classes.

VI Disclosure of Unpaid Meal Charge and Debt Collection Action Plan

- Mailed to all district households in conjunction with the Transportation/Nutrition "Back To School" Joint Mailing each August.
- Added to all New Family Enrollment Folders
- Issued to all incoming transfer students
- Published on the Hopkins School Nutrition Website
- Included in Student Handbooks

Sample Outstanding Balance Letter

[PARENT/GUARDIAN NAME(S)]

[ADDRESS]

[CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE]

[MM/DD/YEAR]

Dear [NAME(S)],

The goal of [NAME OF SCHOOL'S] breakfast and lunch program is to provide healthy meals to children during the school day. In order to serve healthy, high-quality meals to all children, we must make sure we are financially secure. You play a key role in this effort, and are responsible for purchases made by your child in our school cafeteria.

As of [DATE], your child has a negative balance of \$[X.XX]. We strongly encourage you to pay this amount as soon as possible. Your response to this request is important. Paying back a debt shows your personal responsibility. It also keeps our food service program strong and ensures all children at our school have access to the healthy food they need to focus in the classroom.

To review [NAME OF SCHOOL'S] Meal Charge Policy, and the penalties for failing to pay back your child's negative balance, please visit [include web address here, or include a copy of the Unpaid Meal Charge Policy in the letter]. We understand that mistakes happen. But meal payments are important to our program, and we must collect your cafeteria debt.

Please contact [NAME OF SCHOOL OFFICIAL] if you have questions. If you think your child may qualify for free or reduced price school meals, please see the next page.

Thank you for your quick payment.

Sincerely,

[NAME],

[TITLE]

CC: [NAME OF TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, SUPERINTENDENT, ETC. AS APPROPRIATE]