

## **MEAL CHARGES FOR STUDENTS**

### **POLICY:**

#### **Nutrition and Food Services Program**

The Board of Directors supports the philosophy of the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs and will provide wholesome and nutritious meals for children in the District's schools. The Board authorizes the Superintendent to administer the Food & Nutrition Services Program, provided that any decision to enter into a contract with a food service management company will require the approval of the Board. Expenditures for food supplies should not exceed the estimated revenues.

The Superintendent (or designee) is responsible for:

- Annually distributing meal applications and determining eligibility for school meals;
- Protecting the identity of students eligible for free and reduced-priced meals;
- Ensuring meals meet USDA meal pattern requirements;
- Ensuring meal periods are in compliance with USDA regulations;
- Establishing a Food Safety Plan;
- Determining meal prices and submitting them to the Board for approval annually;
- Using the full entitlement of USDA Foods;
- Maintaining a nonprofit school food service account;
- Ensuring all revenues are used solely for the school meal program;
- Establishing a meal charge policy;
- Accommodating children with special dietary needs;
- Ensuring compliance with USDA nondiscrimination policies;
- Following proper procurement procedures; and
- Ensuring compliance with the Smart Snacks in School standards.

The Lake Stevens School District feeds every child who wants a meal.

School staff members will not initiate conversations with children regarding meal charges.

Because hunger is an impediment to learning, no child will be denied a school meal because of an inability to pay.

The National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs are integral in ensuring that students have access to nutritious meals to support their academic success.

It is also imperative to protect the financial stability of the District's Food Services Program.

Cross References:

Policy No. 5560: Student Fees, Fines, Charges

Legal References:

Washington State Law, Hunger-Free Students' Bill of Rights Act  
RCW28A.235 and 28A.300

## **MEAL CHARGES FOR STUDENTS**

### **PROCEDURES:**

The following procedures establish a consistent process for charging meals when students do not have money to pay. These procedures will (1) minimize the identification of children who do not have money to pay and (2) provide for the collection of unpaid meal charges. These procedures ensure that the Food & Nutrition Services Department staff, school administrators, families, and students have a shared understanding of expectations in these situations.

### **Charging Meals**

Any child who requests a meal will be served a fully reimbursable meal from the daily menu that meets the USDA's nutrition standards for school meals. Children are allowed to charge meals to their account even when an unpaid balance is on the account. A student's meal account may not be blocked to deny or delay a nutritionally adequate meal. However, no a la carte or adult meal charges will be allowed for any student.

Children who have money to pay for a meal at the time of service must be provided a meal. The money may not be used to repay previously unpaid charges if the child intended to use the money to purchase that day's meal.

### **Protecting Children's Confidentiality**

The Lake Stevens School District strives to serve each child with dignity and respect. Handstamps, stickers, or any other means of overt identification of children with unpaid meal debt in the cafeteria or the classroom are prohibited. Additionally, children with unpaid meal debt shall not be required to work off their debt, including, but not limited to, wiping down tables or cleaning the cafeteria.

All communication regarding unpaid meal debt will be directed to parents or guardians. Schools may send a letter home from the Food & Nutrition Services Department with children in an unmarked envelope. If a child asks about his/her meal account balance, the Food Services staff will communicate with the child discreetly.

### **Preventing Meal Charges**

To prevent excessive meal charges, the Food & Nutrition Services Department staff will (1) notify families of negative account balances and (2) ensure that all eligible families are certified for free and reduced-priced school meals by:

- Providing all households with school meal applications prior to the start of the school year;
- Providing school meal applications in the primary language of the parent or guardian. Households with questions or need assistance with completing an application may contact the Food & Nutrition Services Department at (425) 335-1561 or the Family Engagement Specialist;
- Utilizing data provided by the State or other school district officials regularly to certify eligible children without an application;
- Making efforts to directly certify a child for free or reduced-priced meals through the State when their household has unpaid meal fees. If the Food & Nutrition Services Department is unable to directly certify the child, the District will contact the family by phone and/or in writing to encourage completion of the school meal application; and
- Completing a school meal application for any child known to be eligible for free or reduced-priced school meals if the household fails to apply.

### **Notifying Households of Low and Negative Account Balances**

The Food & Nutrition Services Department will use the District's automated communications system to notify parents of negative account balances. Parents may also sign up for low-balance notifications through the online payment system. The Food & Nutrition Services Department may send a negative account balance statement home in an unmarked white envelope with the child's name via the school office.

### **Collecting Unpaid Meal Debt**

Any household not certified for free or reduced-priced meals with a negative school meal account balance will be contacted promptly by the Food & Nutrition Services Department by email, phone, or letter about their negative balance. This department will communicate with principals, school counselors, and/or teachers on a case-by-case basis to understand the child and parents' situation to be able to work with each family. Online account payment, cash, or check will be accepted.

For households that cannot afford to pay their school meal charges, the Food & Nutrition Services Department staff will work with them to establish a payment plan. Households that are certified for free or reduced-priced school meals at a point later in the school year will not be required to repay school meal debt accrued earlier in that school year.

### **Donations and Uncollectable Debt**

Private donations to offset unpaid student meal debts will be accepted by the District through the standard donations process. The District welcomes families to donate excess funds left in their child's Food Services account, except in the case of households approved for reduced-priced meal benefits whose accounts must be refunded per federal requirements. Private donations made to individual schools will be sent to the Educational Service Center to be equitably distributed throughout the district.

Unpaid meal debt not paid prior to a student's withdrawal date will be considered delinquent debt and will be turned over to the District's Accounting Department and will follow its procedures for the collection process. An account is deemed uncollectable (bad debt) if the child has incurred charges and is not certified for free or reduced-priced meals, all attempts to collect have been unsuccessful, and/or the child is no longer a student in the district.