

## SCHOOL MEAL ACCOUNT CHARGES AND COLLECTIONS

The Elkhorn Area School District uses an automated meal accounting system to record food service payments and to monitor food transactions. The system functions as a debit system. Parents/guardians are expected to maintain their meal account in a positive status. Students and adults may also choose to pay cash in the meal line.

Parents/guardians who cannot afford to pay for the cost of their children's meals may complete an application for free or reduced meals in accordance with the United States Department of Agriculture Child Nutrition program regulations.

The District shall have guidelines in place that identify criteria for the use of small claims court, collection agencies/services, and debt resolution.

### **Access to School Meals and Other Food Service Items**

Parents and guardians must plan for their child to have sufficient access to food at school on each school day and must actively monitor and manage their child's school food service account. In order to help parents and guardians meet these responsibilities and to ensure that school families are reasonably informed about the food- service options that are available to students, the District has established the following guidelines regarding food- service charges and student access to food at school:

1. A student will always be permitted to select and receive one of the standard school meal options if either of the following apply:
  - a. The District has determined that the student is currently eligible to receive free meals at school; or
  - b. The student has sufficient prepaid funds in his/her food service account, or enough money in hand to pay for the meal on the day the meal is purchased.
2. When a student pays for a school meal or any other food-service item, the general rule is that payment is due no later than at the time of service. However, if a student does not have enough money to pay for a meal, the District's food service account system normally allows a student to charge up to -\$13 in the family account as a negative balance. The privilege of charging school meals is subject to the following restrictions:
  - a. At each meal service, a student may charge only one of the standard school meal options that is being offered (i.e., a federally-qualifying meal option that is on the menu). Students may not charge the cost of a second meal, an extra entree, or any a la carte items.
  - b. The District may deny the privilege of charging meals to a student who repeatedly establishes a negative account balance that is not promptly repaid upon notice of the amount owed.
  - c. A parent or guardian may set a daily limit on food charges that may be made to a student account. A parent or guardian may also arrange to restrict their child's ability

to charge a negative balance, but doing so leads to a greater likelihood that a student will be denied a meal due to an inadvertent low balance.

3. A student who reaches the limit on charged meals, who does not have money for purchasing food, and who does not bring food from home will be informed that he/she cannot receive meals or other items from the school food service program on that school day. The District's goal is to make multiple attempts to provide a student's parent or guardian with notice of a low or negative balance before the point at which a student who pays for school meals is denied access to school-prepared food during a school meal period.
  - a. An alternate meal of a cheese sandwich and juice cup will be provided and charged at \$.40. Dietary accommodations will be made.

### **Negative Account Balances and Collection Procedures**

The District strongly encourages school families to regularly fund a prepaid school food service account for each student in the household. A negative balance in a student food service account is a debt that is owed by the student's parent or guardian (or, if applicable, by an adult student).

Once a student's account has a negative balance, the District will make an initial and at least one documented follow-up attempt to collect the debt by providing a person responsible for payment with notice (e.g., by mail, email, telephone, or a similar method) of the amount owed. Payment is due immediately upon notice. If these attempts are not successful, a school official will attempt to make a person-to-person telephone contact or schedule an in-person meeting with a person responsible for payment. The parties may discuss payment plan options. If a negative balance still has not been paid after the previous steps:

1. Debt in a student food service account is not automatically discharged, forgiven, or reduced at the end of the school year or due to a change in a student's enrollment status (e.g., graduates, transfers, drops-out, etc.).
2. At its discretion, the District may continue to pursue collection efforts. However, as long as the total amount owed by any household (for all children in the household) does not exceed \$30, the District normally will not refer the debt to a third-party collection agency or pursue collection in small claims court.
3. Debts owed to the District's food service program may result in the denial of certain school-related privileges in the same manner that applies to other past-due school fees and charges.

### **Payments and Account Management**

In addition to using the online account system to make payments, a person who needs or wishes to make a payment for a student's meals or food service account may (1) present a payment in person using cash or check during normal school hours at all school locations, (2) bring cash to the main office of the student's school in order to pay for a student's meal or other food service items on the actual day of service, (3) provide a student with cash to pay for items on the day of service, or (4) request consideration of other methods by contacting the Food Service Supervisor.

The District charges a fee at the rate established by the District's financial institution for each check that is returned or denied payment by a financial institution. After a check is returned or denied payment, the District may refuse to accept payment by personal check in the future.

**Additional Information and Assistance**

For assistance with all issues and questions related to the District's food service program, including eligibility and applications for free or reduced-price meals, the District's online account management system, as well as the specific issues addressed in these procedures, school families can contact the District's Food Service Supervisor.

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