

Swan River Montessori Charter School

Adopted: 1.17.08

Reviewed: 8.24.21

Meal Charge and Serving Procedures Policy

PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent school district practices for the provision of meals to students as well as consistent meal payment practices for all families. This policy also includes district practices for the provision of meals in general as well as to students who have insufficient funds in their school meal accounts and the collection of unpaid meal debt.

GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

- A. Swan River Montessori Charter School (SRMCS) recognizes the parent/guardian's responsibility to provide nutritious meals for their children. Proper nutrition is essential for adequate learning to occur.
- B. It is the goal of SRMCS to provide nutritious meals to students to promote healthy eating habits and enhance learning as well as eliminate stigmatization of children who are unable to pay meals charges.
- C. It is the policy of SRMCS to offer lunches that meet state and federal guidelines.
- D. The Food Service Provider (FSP) strives to produce quality meals in a fiscally responsible manner.
- E. Families may apply for free/reduced-price meal benefits anytime during the school year. Meal applications are distributed to all families in the district prior to the student's first day of classes. In addition, applications are available on all scheduled school days from 9:00 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. in the school's main office.
- F. Per Minnesota Statute 124D.111 subdivision 4 requires that "any reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances do not demean or stigmatize any child participating in the school lunch program." Collecting and asking for meal payments will be done in a respectful matter. At no time will a meal policy target or shame students for financial considerations beyond their control.

MEAL PURCHASING AND PAYMENT PROCEDURES

Ordering of Meals

- All families will receive a monthly lunch menu and order form to order meals.
- Meal orders and payment for all meals purchased are due by the date stated on the order form.
- The Hot Lunch Coordinator tallies the number of meals ordered per day and submits those totals to the contracted catering company.
- The Hot Lunch Coordinator, or a designee, ensures that all milk provided to students is refrigerated at the mandated temperature and is within the date of expiration as indicated on individual cartons.

MEAL CHARGE PROCEDURES

Forgotten Lunches

If a student forgets his/her lunch, SRMCS will provide a hot lunch, whenever possible. SRMCS contracts with a catering company and, therefore, must order meals a minimum of one week in advance. This may mean that a hot lunch is not available. In this case, the student will be offered a grain, protein, fruit/vegetable, and milk. The parent(s)/guardian(s) will be notified via written notice and/or email that the lunch has been provided and the charge for that lunch.

A charge for a forgotten lunch will cost the same amount as a standard ordered lunch.

Insufficient or Overdrawn Meal Accounts

All students will be provided a meal regardless of meal account status.

Students eligible for free/reduced-price meals will always be served a meal regardless of unpaid food service accounts.

"Cash In Hand" Payments

All meals must be pre-ordered from the contracted catering company a minimum of one week in advance. Therefore, SRMCS is unable to accept student "cash in hand" payments for meals. However, SRMCS does accept student "cash in hand" payments for milk (only).

Notification of Account Status

- Written notification is provided on a monthly basis to individual families only if their meal account has a credit or a negative balance in any amount. If no written notification is provided, the family's account status is current.
- Should a family receive a notice regarding their account status, the expectation is that the positive or negative balance be applied to the next month's meal order payment.
- The Hot Lunch Coordinator, or designee, may contact individual families via email, telephone, or written notice to discuss account status and request payment. A second or third request for payment will be sent if the parent(s)/guardian(s) have not responded.
- Non-sufficient funds (NSF) checks will follow the school's NSF procedures as stated in the Parent Handbook.
- Families may contact the main office to request account balance information at any time.
- Notification methods may be different depending on individual/family circumstances.

Collectable Meal Debt

- When payment is overdue, the debt is classified as delinquent as long as it is considered collectable and efforts are being made to collect it.

- If the Hot Lunch Coordinator, or designee, attempts to request payment up to three times and there has been no response and/or no payment received, s/he will notify the School Director to determine an appropriate solution.
- The School Director, or designee, will contact the family and review with them their responsibility to provide meals for their child.
- Assistance from the county social services may be requested by the school if the parent(s)/guardian(s) refuse to provide meals or pay for school-prepared meals for their child.
- A formal letter will be sent to the household notifying that the debt will be turned over to a third-party collection agency.
- Debt may be carried over from year to year until paid in full.
- SRMCS reserves the right to accept cash-only payments if repeated late or non-payments have occurred.

Uncollectable Meal Debt

- When the School Director determines further collection efforts for delinquent debt are useless or too costly, the debt will be re-classified as “uncollectable debt.”
- When this re-classification is made, the debt is written off as an operating loss.
- Food service funds may not be used to cover costs related to uncollectable debt. These losses must be restored using non-federal funds such as the school district’s general fund, so a transfer must be made into the Food Service Fund (Fund 2) to cover the loss.
- Once delinquent meal charges are converted to uncollectable debt, records relating to those charges must be maintained in accordance with the record retention requirements.

MEAL SERVING PROCEDURES

The following steps are taken daily as part of SRMCS’ meal serving procedures:

1. A capful of cafeteria sanitizer is diluted into “red sanitizer” bucket with warm water.
2. A designated wash cloth is used to wipe down serving carts and silver tables. This cloth is kept submerged in solution when it is not in use.
3. The vegetables/fruits from the previous day are taken from the designated student lunch refrigerator and put on the cart to take upstairs to the lunch service area.
4. Fruit and vegetables are placed on the cold serving buffet. Extra servings are kept inside the cooler underneath the buffet and/or in the designated refrigerator.
5. Serving trays are counted out for Children’s House students and placed on designated lunch carts (one cart per classroom).
6. Lunch trays are counted out for each classroom. Prior to the first group of being served, the trays are spread out on the designated silver serving table to the right. All other trays are stacked onto a designated black cart in preparation for subsequent groups of students.
7. A few minutes before each class comes into the lunch room, the entrees are portioned and served onto the trays.

8. Each student chooses a tray (with the entrée already served) then continues to the fruit/veggie bar where they select two items.
9. A trained staff member of the lunch program, or a designee, tallies each student meal served in the claims computer program provided by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Students then leave the serving area with their fully reimbursable meal.
10. The students carry their lunch tray with a fully reimbursable meal back to their classroom. Note:
 - a. All E-2 students (grades 4-6) will have already picked up their milk and placed it on their tray (if they choose to have it that day) prior to being served lunch.
 - b. All E-1 (grades 1-3) and Children's House (prek-kindergarten) students receive their milk once returned to the classroom with their lunch tray. A designated student and/or staff member gather the number of milk cartons ordered, place them in a bin/basket, and bring them to the classroom. Students choose the milk type (skim, 1%, or chocolate) s/he ordered from the bin/basket and begin eating.

DISSEMINATION AND REVIEW OF POLICY

This policy will be disseminated to all enrolled SRMCS families annually before the start of each school year and to households transferring to SRMCS during the school year. It will also be disseminated to all school employees annually before the start of each school year and to newly-hired SRMCS employees during the school year. This policy is available on the SRMCS web site (www.swanrivermontessori.org) and in the school's main office.

This policy will be reviewed by the SRMCS Board of Directors at least bi-annually and as state and/or federal guidelines require it.

RESOURCES

- USDA Unpaid Meal Charges
- SP 23-2017 Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q & A
- SP 46-2016 Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies
- SP 47-2016 Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meals
- USDA Handbook Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Meal Charge Policy Checklist