

534 SCHOOL MEALS POLICY

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that students receive healthy and nutritious meals through the charter school's nutrition program and that charter school employees, families, and students have a shared understanding of expectations regarding meal charges. The policy of the charter school is to provide meals to students in a respectful manner and to maintain the dignity of students by prohibiting lunch shaming or otherwise ostracizing the student. The policy seeks to allow students to receive the nutrition they need to stay focused during the school day and minimize identification of students with insufficient funds to pay for a la carte items or second meals as well as to maintain the financial integrity of the school nutrition program.

II. 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 meal 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 in the school's main office.

III. PAYMENT OF MEALS

- A. *Students have use of a meal account. When the balance reaches zero, a student may charge no more than 10 meals. When an account reaches this limit, a student shall not be allowed to charge second meals or a la carte items until the negative account balance is paid.*
- B. Free School Meals Program
 - 1. The free school meals program is created within the Minnesota Department of Education.
 - 2. Each school that participates in the United States Department of Agriculture

National School Lunch program and has an Identified Student Percentage at or above the federal percentage determined for all meals to be reimbursed at the free rate must participate in the federal Community Eligibility Provision in order to participate in the free school meals program.

3. Each school that participates in the free school meals program must:
 - a. participate in the United States Department of Agriculture School Breakfast Program and the United States Department of Agriculture National School Lunch Program; and
 - b. provide to all students at no cost up to two (2) federally reimbursable meals per school day, with a maximum of one (1) free breakfast and one (1) free lunch.
 - c. A student who has been determined eligible for free and reduced-price meals must always be served a reimbursable meal even if the student has an outstanding debt.
- C. Once a meal has been placed on a student's tray or otherwise served to a student, the meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meals balance.
- D. When a student has a negative account balance, the student will not be allowed to charge a snack item.
- 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 written permission is received from the parent or guardian.
- F. A student may purchase a second breakfast at the nonprogram price if the student has already selected a reimbursable breakfast.
- G. A student may purchase a second lunch at the nonprogram price if the student has already selected a reimbursable lunch.

[NOTE: New paragraphs F and G apply if a school receives school breakfast aid under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.111 or school lunch aid under Minnesota Statutes, section 124D.111 respectively.]

IV. LOW OR NEGATIVE ACCOUNT BALANCES – NOTIFICATION

- A. The charter school will make reasonable efforts to notify families when meal account balances are low or fall below zero.
- B. Families will be notified of an outstanding negative balance.
- C. Reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any student participating in the school lunch program, including, but not limited to, dumping meals, withdrawing a meal that has been served, announcing or listing students' names publicly, providing alternative meals not specifically related to dietary needs; providing nonreimbursable meals; or affixing stickers, stamps, or pins.

V. UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- A. The charter school will make reasonable efforts to communicate with families to resolve the debt. Collection options may include, but are not limited to, use of collection agencies, claims in the conciliation court, or any other legal method permitted by law.

- B. The charter school 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. Negative balances of more than 10 meals not paid will be turned over to the executive director or executive director's designee for collection. In some instances, the charter school does use a collection agency to collect unpaid school meal debts after reasonable efforts first have been made by the charter school to collect the debt. Collection options may include, but are not limited to, use of collection agencies, claims in the conciliation court, or any other legal method permitted by law.
- D. The charter school may not enlist the assistance of non-charter school employees, such as volunteers, to engage in debt collection efforts.
- E. The charter school will not impose any other restriction prohibited under Minnesota Statutes, section 123B.37 due to unpaid student meal balances. The charter school will not limit a student's participation in any school activities, graduation ceremonies, field trips, athletics, activity clubs, or other extracurricular activities or access to materials, technology, or other items provided to students due to an unpaid student meal balance.

VI. DISSEMINATION AND REVIEW OF POLICY

- A. 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.
- B. This policy and any pertinent supporting information shall be provided in writing (i.e., mail, email, back-to-school packet, student handbook, etc.) to:
 - 1. all households at or before the start of each school year;
 - 2. students and families who transfer into the charter school, at the time of enrollment; and
 - 3. all charter school personnel who are responsible for enforcing this policy.
- C. The charter school will post this policy on the charter school's website, or the website of the organization where the meal is served, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.
- D. If the charter school contracts with a third party for its meal services, it will provide the vendor with its school meals policy. The charter school will ensure that any third-party provider with whom the charter school enters into either an original or modified contract after July 1, 2021, adheres to the charter school's school meals policy.
- E. This policy will be reviewed by the SRMCS Board of Directors at least bi-annually and as state and/or federal guidelines require it.

MEAL CHARGE PROCEDURES [NOTE: These procedures may not need to be in a policy]

PURCHASING AND PAYMENT PROCEDURES

Ordering of Meals

- All will receive a monthly lunch menu and order form to order meals.
- Meal orders and payment for all meals purchased are due by 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.

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 See Articles IV and V above

- 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 See Articles IV and V above

- 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 a "red sanitizer" bucket with warm water. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Serving trays are counted out for Children's House students and placed on designated lunch carts (one cart per classroom).
5. Lunch trays are counted out for each classroom. Prior to the first group 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.
6. A few minutes before each class comes into the lunch room, the entrees are portioned and served onto the trays.
7. Each student chooses a tray (with the entrée already served) then continues to the fruit/veggie bar where they select two items.
8. 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.
9. 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.

Legal References: Minn. Stat. § 123B.37 (Prohibited Fees)
 Minn. Stat. § 124D.111 (School Meals Policies; Lunch Aid; Food Service Accounting)
 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)

Cross References: 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