



Knob Noster Public Schools

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District Meal Charge Procedure

Knob Noster Public Schools recognizes that adequate nutrition is essential to students' mental, physical, and academic growth. However, unpaid meal charges place a large financial burden on the Nutrition Services Department.

This procedure outlines the District's approach to meal charges in order to ensure a consistent and transparent approach to this issue. Communicating such a procedure will prevent confusion for students and families and help promote effective financial management of the school meal programs. Key procedure considerations include, but are not limited to:

- A. Provide children with adequate nutrition to focus in school;
- B. Maintain the financial integrity of the programs operated by the Nutrition Services Program within the District;
- C. Minimize stigmatization of children with meal charges;
- D. Address the serving of reimbursable alternative meals;
- E. Debt collection and debt collection efforts;
- F. How to communicate the procedure, in writing, to families at the start of the school year;
- G. How to communicate the procedure, in writing, to families transferring into the District throughout the year.

Additional communication strategies: "back-to-school" packets, website, and student handbooks.

This written procedure will be available throughout the school year on the District website at www.knobnoster.k12.mo.us. When enforced to a particular student, this written procedure will be provided again to the District household through mail or email.

This written procedure will be provided to all school staff responsible for procedure enforcement including, but not limited to: school food service professionals responsible for collecting payment for meals at the point of service, staff involved in notifying families of low or negative balances, and staff involved in enforcing any other aspects of the meal charge procedure, school social workers, school nurses, the homeless liaison, and other staff members that may assist students in need, principals, assistant principals, and any other administrators.

The District participates in the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). District students, whether at the free, reduced, or paid-rate, will receive a full reimbursable breakfast and/or lunch meal that meets USDA requirements regardless of whether they have, or do not have, adequate money in their student account or in-hand to cover the cost of the meal at the time of service. No reimbursable meal will be withheld from any District student in the event there are no funds or a negative balance in a student's meal account. However, a la carte purchases will be allowed only when a student has enough funds in their account or in-hand to pay for the a la carte item.

If a District student has money in-hand to purchase a reduced-price or paid-meal at the time of the meal service, the student will be provided a meal and those funds will be utilized to purchase that meal, and will not be utilized to pay-down a negative balance. The Nutrition Services Cashier will key a reimbursable breakfast and/or lunch meal, charging the student's account accordingly.

Although a District student may carry a negative balance, it is the student's parent/guardian that is responsible for payment in order to keep the student's balance from becoming negative. If a student has a negative balance at the time they become classified as eligible for either free or reduced price-meal status, having moved from full-pay to either reduced- or free-status or having moved from reduced- to free-status, the parent/guardian is still responsible for the negative balance accrued under the previous meal payment classification.

After a student has accumulated ten (10) combined (breakfast and lunch) meal charges, parents/guardians of students will receive School Messenger phone calls daily to remind them to make a payment to cover their student's negative balance.

A District student's balance, whether positive or negative in nature, will follow the student throughout their academic career as they graduate from grade to grade. Upon written request, positive balances may be refunded or moved to sibling accounts.

District employees are mandated by the state of Missouri to report any instances of suspected abuse or neglect to the Children's Division (CD) of the Department of Social Services. District personnel will report to the CD any instance where a student's arrival at school with no provision for food leads to a reasonable cause to suspect neglect.

If charges continue without repayment:

1. Parent/guardian may be contacted by school staff to offer services or assistance as needed.
2. Parent/guardian may be encouraged to submit a Free- And Reduced-Priced Meal Application which can be found here.
3. Parent/guardian may be subjected to a collections process involving a third party agency.

DEFINITIONS:

What Is A National School Lunch Program, or NSLP, Meal?

For lunch, all meals must provide five components: fruit, vegetables, meat/meat alternates, grains, and milk. For a lunch to be a program meal, the meal must contain ½-cup fruit or vegetables and at least two other servings from the five component groups. Three of the five components must be chosen with one of those components being either a fruit or vegetable for the meal to be reimbursable.

What Is A School Breakfast Program, or SBP, Meal?

There are three component groups that make up the breakfast meal pattern: grains (with optional meat/meat alternate allowed), fruit, fluid milk. For the breakfast meal to be a program meal the three components must be served.

What Is A Charged Meal?

A charged meal occurs when a student enters the cashier line with a program meal and does not have the funds in his/her account or in-hand to sufficiently pay for the program meal. These meals are not taken from students.

Extra items, or a la carte items, are not allowed to be charged and will be taken from students with insufficient funds in their account.

STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES:

Negative Balances-Student Accounts

If a child has money to purchase a reduced-price or paid-meal at the time of the meal service, the child will be provided a meal. SFAs may not use the child's money to repay previously unpaid charges if the child intended to use the money to purchase that day's meal. Children who qualify for free meals will never be denied a meal, even if they have accrued a negative balance from other purchases in the cafeteria. Free And Reduced Meal Application is included in this procedure and can also be accessed at any school facility.

No school program meal will be taken away from any District student in the event there are no funds or a negative balance in a student's meal account. These meals are processed as program meals.

All students will receive a program meal during a negative balance period and be charged accordingly. If a Middle or High School student comes through a cashier line with a reimbursable meal, but does not have funds in their account, the student will be charged for the reimbursable meal and be reminded discreetly of the charge procedure. All meals will be processed as program meals and will be charged to the student's meal account accordingly.

Parents of students with negative account balance beyond ten (10) meals will receive School Messenger phone calls daily to remind them to make a payment to cover their student's negative balance.

Site Manager Responsibilities-

The Site Manager will run the Account Balance report for accounts with negative balances in excess of ten (10) meals and will take the following actions, logging all steps on a Student Account Log:

1. Send a copy of the student's Customer History report, a Free/Reduced Price Meal application, and Negative Balance letter home to the parent via the school secretary or teacher once a week for two weeks. This information is to be sent in a plain, white, un-marked envelope. Documentation of information and process is to be made and kept on-site.
2. By the third week, if the account is still negative, the Site Manager will contact the School Liaison, in regards to:
 - a. The Site Manager will give the Liaison the student's Customer History report, and
 - b. The date first contact was sent to the student's family.
 - c. The Site Manager will ask the Liaison to follow up with the family to see if they have any questions and find out if help is needed in filling out the Free/Reduced Price Meal application.
 - d. The Site Manager will fill out the Student Account log noting the date of contact with the Liaison.
 - e. The Site Manager will ask that the Liaison note the date contact was made with the student's family.
 - f. Site Manager will obtain all documentation.

3. If a negative balance persists after the 4th week, and /or there has been no reported payments, the Site Manager will scan the Student Account log and send to their Supervisor and to the Free And Reduced Specialist.

Free And Reduced Specialist Responsibilities-

The Free And Reduced Specialist will monitor account balances of students and maintain documentation of when attempts have been made.

1. The Free And Reduced Specialist will run the Account Balance report for negative balances and will review the Student Account log set of information sent from the Site Manager for, but not limited to:

- a. Documented account information sent to the family, and
- b. Documented information provided by FSL in order to determine if there is a potential hardship and provide documentation & discussion with the NS Director for directives on next steps.

c. Customer history will also be looked at in the following areas:

- i. Was the student previously qualified for free- and/or reduced-priced meals?
- ii. Has the student consistently run a negative balance?
- iii. Have payments been made, or are payments being made?

2. Based on review outcome of the above, the Free And Reduced Specialist will send 2 progressive negative balance letters with the student's Customer History report and a Free and Reduced Application via email or by mail. The dates and the type of letter sent is to be documented and maintained.

a. The first letter, an Outstanding Balance letter, will be sent out at -\$25.00.

- i. Response required 15 days from date of letter.
- ii. No response may result in account being sent to collections.

b. The second letter, a Final Outstanding Balance letter, will be sent out at -\$50.00.

- i. Response required 15 days from date of letter.
- ii. No response will result in account being sent to collections.

3. If no response from the parent/guardian is received after the 2 progressive negative balance letters it will be turned over to Collections (outside collection services- District contracted).

a. Cost - \$10.72 per student.

b. Phase 1 of collections (60 days) – Nutrition Services will receive 100% of any payment made to a student's account.

c. Phase 2 of Collections – Any payments made, Nutrition Services will receive 60% of payment, recorded into student's account, and collection agency will receive 40% of payment. This amount will be written off by Nutrition Services.

4. If a family has a negative balance at the time they become classified as eligible for either free or reduced price-meal status, having moved from full-pay to either reduced or free status or having moved from reduced to free status, the family is still responsible for the negative balance accrued under the previous meal payment classification.
5. Attempts made to contact families with negative balances, other than automated phone calls, must be logged.

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