

Unpaid Meal Charge and Debt Collection Procedure

Introduction

Beginning July 1, 2017, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) requires Escuela Éxitos to have a written and clearly communicated meal charge policy or procedure which needs to be distributed to households at the start of each school year and is at the discretion of the school.

This policy/procedure articulate how students will be charged for meals, as well as offering alternate meals, limits on meal charges, or allowing neither meal charges nor alternate meals when a student's account has insufficient funds. Additionally, the policy addresses how unpaid meal debt will be collected.

All staff responsible for enforcement (including food service staff, office/administrative staff, principals, social workers, homeless liaison, etc.), will be aware of this policy.

Per Minnesota statute "any reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances will not demean or stigmatize any child participating in the school lunch program." Collecting and asking for meal payments will be done in a respectful manner. We are in the best position to understand our school community's attitudes, beliefs and cultural sensitivities on methods of reminding and collecting payments. Our meal policy will not target or shame students for financial considerations beyond their control.

We will notify households of the meal charge and collection policy/procedure, through multiple. Options will be included in the student/parent handbook, the back- to-school free/reduced-price meal application, and posted on the school/district website. NOTE: USDA requires that all schools provide written information directly to households, so posting the policy on the district website alone is not sufficient.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent school practices for the provision of meals to students who have insufficient funds in their school meal accounts and the collection of unpaid meal debt.

General Statement of Policy

1. Escuela Éxitos goal is to provide nutritious meals to students to promote healthy eating habits and enhance learning as well as maintain the financial integrity of the National School Breakfast and Lunch program and eliminate stigmatization of children who are unable to pay meal charges.
2. It is the policy of Escuela Éxitos to offer breakfast and lunch meals as well as snack that meet state and federal guidelines.
3. Escuela Éxitos will accept payments in the form of cash, check, or direct credit card payment in the JMC system. Note that all payments delivered to the office by the student should be verified by the parent via a phone call. A receipt of cash received will be provided to the student. Parent delivering cash will be provided with a receipt of cash received.

4. 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 in the office. If household income or size change, families can apply for meal benefits anytime during the school year.

Charge Policy

1. Students eligible for free or reduced-price meals will always be served a meal regardless of unpaid food service accounts. When a student eligible for PAID meals has "cash in hand" to pay for a meal, the student will be served a meal regardless of unpaid foodservice accounts. The "cash in hand" will not be applied towards past due balances.
2. If the student or family account has insufficient funds to pay for breakfast and/or lunch meals, Escuela Éxitos will allow the student to purchase a meal and allow the student's account to be overdrawn or become negative.
3. Students will always be given/provided a meal. Students will be allowed to charge a meal provided they are not overdrawn by 10 meals (any combination of breakfasts or lunches). Students with more than 10 meals in the negative or overdrawn will not have a choice but will be provided (and have to pay for) a breakfast or lunch from an absent student. In the case that there are no absent students, the student will be provided (and charged for) a lunch or breakfast from the back-up meals.
4. Students with an overdrawn account are not allowed to charge ala carte items. If their account is overdrawn by more than 10 meals, they may not have the choice to be served the listed breakfast or lunch.

Notification of Account Status

Family communication is critical. Hence:

1. Families will be able to check their student's meal account balance via the JMC Parent portal or contact the office for account balances.
2. The Food Service Department will send e-mails, text messages and place phone calls to all parents who only have 4 meals remaining, advising them of the student meal account balance(s). Students will be given a written and/or verbal reminder in the meal service line.
 - a. The student/family will be notified when the account has a balance enough to cover the next 4 meals.
 - b. The student/family will be notified when the account has a negative/overdrawn balance and they are two meals away from being 10 meals overdrawn.
 - c. The student/family will be notified when the account has exceeded 10 meals overdrawn and the student will not have a choice to select the listed breakfast or lunch.
3. Food Service Department will encourage parents to complete the free/reduced-price meal application, especially if the family informs the teacher or school of changes in their financial status.
4. Parents will be notified of any NSF checks received and will be responsible for reimbursing the school in cash, cashier's check or money order the amount of the NSF check, in addition to the amount the school was charged for the NSF funds "currently at \$20.00". Families wanted to pay that amount via a credit card via our JMC system will be allowed to charge the amount of the NSF check for the meals but not the NSF funds as they cover different things. Overdraft fee reimbursement has to be made in cash, cashier's check or money order.
5. Any parent who has two NSF checks to their name will not be allowed to pay by check through the remainder of the school year.

Collection of Unpaid Meal Debt

When the student meal balance is over 10 meals overdrawn or in the negative, the following collection actions will be taken for all students and all grades:

1. The Food and Nutrition Coordinator will contact the household to request payment.
2. The Food and Nutrition staff will contact the building principal if no payment is received. The principal will contact the parent/guardian to determine an appropriate solution.

NOTE: Escuela Éxitos will create a funding source where community organizations, community members, and/or other families of the school or family members will be able to submit funds to help subsidize the meals for any student/family struggling with making payments. All in an effort to keep children fed. These funds will be applied to the accounts of families who do not qualify for a free or reduced meal and are requesting school assistance with their children's meals. Funds in this account will be used at the end of the year to pay for any meals owed.

Escuela Éxitos **does not** contract a collection agency for the collections of unpaid meal debt.

Adopted and Board Approved
4-20-2022

By: _____
Sam Pfeifer (Board Chair)