

## **Meal Charge Policy**

### **I. Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish consistent meal account procedures throughout the District. Unpaid charges place a financial strain on the Student Nutrition Department and the District. This policy ensures:

- All students are treated with dignity in the serving line, regardless of meal account balance.
- Parents/guardians take responsibility for meal payments.
- The District maintains consistent practices for charging and collecting outstanding balances, while promoting positive interactions among District staff, parents/guardians, and the community.

### **II. General Statement of Policy**

All School Food Authorities (SFAs) operating the National School Lunch and/or School Breakfast Programs must have written procedures addressing situations when students do not have funds to pay for meals. This policy outlines the meal charge procedures of the Rapid City Area Schools (RCAS) Student Nutrition Department.

### **III. Definitions**

- Negative Balance: When a student's meal account has insufficient funds to pay for a meal.
- Alternate Meal: A meal that meets nutritional requirements but is offered in place of the standard meal when a student's account is overdrawn.
- Community Eligibility Provision (CEP): A federal provision allowing schools in high-poverty areas to serve meals at no cost to all students.

### **IV. Procedure**

#### **Scope of Responsibility:**

Student Nutrition Department: Maintains charge records and notifies the student's parent/guardian of negative balances.

Parents/Guardians: Responsible for maintaining a positive meal account balance, making prompt payments for any charges incurred, keeping current contact information on file,

requesting assistance with Free and Reduced-Price Meal Applications, verifying student's eligibility status, requesting help through available community donations (meal assistance funds), and establishing payment plans.

**Meal Access:**

Students with a negative balance will not be served breakfast unless they qualify for free meals.

At lunchtime, the District will make reasonable efforts to ensure students have access to a meal that meets program requirements, even when an account balance is negative.

Students may continue to receive lunch in these situations; however, meal service may be adjusted as permitted under applicable USDA guidelines.

**Meal Benefit Applications:**

Families are encouraged to complete a Free and Reduced-Price Meal Application if they believe they may qualify. Approved applications apply moving forward and do not erase prior charges.

A new application is to be completed each school year; those who currently qualify or receive SNAP/TANF will have until 30 days after the first day of school to complete a new application.

Applications are available online, at school offices, and at the Student Nutrition Office.

Assistance is available upon request.

Families who qualify but choose not to apply remain responsible for all meal payments.

**Transfers from CEP Schools:**

Students transferring from a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school (where meals are provided at no charge) to a non-CEP school will be notified of the change and have 10 days to complete a Free and Reduced-Price Meal Application.

Students receiving meals through direct agency match (e.g., participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) will continue to receive free meals at non-CEP schools.

**Account Balances and Meal Payments:**

The District communicates negative meal account balances regularly through various methods, including mail, email, and phone calls. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of parents/guardians to monitor their student's account and ensure a positive balance is maintained.

Student meal account balances can be viewed online via the District's Student Information System. Payments may be made online, in person at the Student Nutrition Office or school, or by credit/debit card over the phone.

**Delinquent Accounts & Collections:**

The District's student information system will automatically send notifications of negative balances to parents/guardians daily, unless parent/guardians opt out of receiving notifications.

In addition, parents/guardians will also receive written notice of negative balance by postal mail to the address on file at minimum three times throughout the school year.

If the balance remains unpaid despite repeated outreach, the account may be referred to a collection agency. Parents/guardians will be notified in writing of referral. Any additional fees incurred will be the responsibility of the parent/guardian.

Failure to receive a notice does not exempt parents/guardians from responsibility for the negative balance or subsequent collection actions.

Families are encouraged to contact the Student Nutrition Office at any time to discuss payment options or establish a payment plan to assist with negative meal account balances.

**End-of-Year Balance Carryover:**

Meal account balances, whether the amount is positive or negative, carry over from year to year.

**Additional Support and Community Partnerships:**

The District may collaborate with local businesses or community organizations to establish a meal assistance fund to support families who are struggling to pay for school meals.

Donations to this fund may be applied to student accounts at the discretion of the Student Nutrition Office, with priority given to families demonstrating financial hardship.

Individuals or organizations interested in supporting families in need may make donations directly to the Student Nutrition Office.

Adopted:

Reviewed:

District Code EFA

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Legal Reference:

Cross Reference:

Rapid City Area School District No. 51-4, Rapid City, South Dakota