

MMSD Food & Nutrition Negative Account Policy

September 1, 2017

Our School Nutrition Program aims to provide healthy meals for children to support a caring and effective learning environment. We want to ensure that all students who are eligible for free, reduced or full paid meals are able to participate in this important aspect of the school day. Here are some ways we raise awareness of our meal programs and account policy:

- Enrollment Communications campaign
- Support for families needing application assistance
- Data dashboard to assist school social workers with outreach to families who have not yet applied for benefits but were eligible the prior year.
- Direct certification process to automatically qualify students in households with lower incomes. This process simplifies access for free meals without the need to fill out a household application
- E-mail, phone and letter contact for families with benefits that will expire

In order to serve healthy nutritious meals to all children, we must make sure that we are financially secure in the Food & Nutrition Operation. We firmly believe that collection efforts for unpaid meal debt should focus on communication with the parent or guardian and should not involve students in the cafeteria or classroom.

A child nutrition assistance fund has been established at the Madison Foundation for Public Schools. Donations to this fund will be used to assist families with extenuating or emergency situations. Donations can be made at www.fmps.org

Families and staff should prepay and have funds on account for all food purchases. Cash at the time of purchase will also be accepted. If a student has a negative account balance, they will not be allowed to purchase ala carte items unless cash is available at the time of purchase. However, the student will be granted access to the standard daily breakfast and lunch meals despite a negative account balance.

The Free and reduced meal benefit program is federally funded and benefit eligibility needs to be established each school year. Families are strongly encouraged to confirm eligibility prior to the start of each school year. Providing meals for students that are not eligible for federal assistance is the financial responsibility of the parent or guardian. Parents or guardians will be responsible for any charges incurred, including purchases made prior to eligibility for federal benefits. Debt in a student food service account is **not** automatically discharged, forgiven or reduced at the end of the school year or due to a student change in enrollment status. MMSD reserves the right to pursue additional debt collection efforts where deemed appropriate. MMSD provides assistance with **short term emergencies**. We are committed to helping families connect with community resources and support where home prepared meals are a long term solution to insure proper child nutrition.

Negative account balances will be communicated to parents with e-mails, letters, automated phone messages and personal phone calls. Failure to respond to requests for setting up a payment plan or other arrangements for long term student meals could put future MMSD assistance at risk of cancellation.