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SCHOOL MEAL CHARGE AND UNPAID DEBT POLICY

APPROVED: 05/2023

UPDATED:

I. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

Achieve Language Academy recognizes the important link between proper nutrition and academic success. The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent district procedure for charging meals when students do not have money to pay, ensuring all students are treated with dignity and respect, preventing meal charges for students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunches, and ensuring eligible students are certified for free and reduced-price school meals.

II. PROVIDING LUNCH FOR STUDENTS WITH NO FUNDS OR UNPAID MEAL DEBT

Achieve Language Academy shall comply with all requirements established in MN Statute 124D.111 to ensure that all students receive meals while at school, that they are treated with dignity and respect, and that families are made aware and have access to the school meal policy and information on how to apply for Free or Reduced-Price Meals.

Hunger is a recognized impediment to students' functioning and learning. Achieve Language Academy's policy is that no child shall be denied a school meal because of an inability to pay. Children will be served a meal that meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrition standards for school meals.

To ensure that all students receive the nutrition they need to learn while at school, Achieve Language Academy establishes the following requirements for the school nutrition program:

- A. Achieve Language Academy prohibits the use of hand stamps, stickers, or any other means of overt identification of children with unpaid meal debt in the cafeteria or the classroom are prohibited.
- B. If a student reaches the cashier and does not have available funds for the meal, the cashier may discreetly make a note to inform the Food Service Manager at a later time. The cashier or other staff members may not verbally address the student regarding their meal balance,



demand payment, or refuse to allow the student to take the meal they have been provided.

1. Any reminder for payment of outstanding meal balances cannot demean or stigmatize any child, including, but not limited to dumping meals, announcing or listing students' names publicly, or affixing stickers, stamps, or pins.
- C. Students with unpaid meal debt will receive the same meal as their peers.
 - D. Students with unpaid meal debt shall not be required to work off their debt, including, but not limited to, wiping down tables or cleaning the cafeteria.
 - E. Once a student has been given a meal, the meal may not be withdrawn by a cashier or any other school official regardless of whether the student has an outstanding meal balance.
 - F. Students' 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 may not be restricted due to an unpaid student meal balance.

III. FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE SCHOOL MEALS

Achieve Language Academy asks and strongly encourages all families to complete the Application for Educational Benefits on an annual basis, regardless of the household income. To ensure that all eligible families are certified for free and reduced-price school meals, the Achieve Language Academy food and nutrition department shall:

- A. provide all households with school meal applications prior to the start of the school year and/or include instructions for completing online school meal applications;
- B. provide school meal applications in the primary language of the parent or guardian and provide assistance with completing an application for any household that requests assistance;
- C. promptly utilize data provided by the state or other school district officials to certify eligible children without an application; and
- D. assure that any child for which the school district is not able to obtain a completed school meal application, but becomes aware of their eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals shall be certified based on an application submitted by the appropriate school official, as permitted by USDA guidance.



IV. PAYMENT FOR SCHOOL LUNCH BALANCES

To ensure that households are aware of negative account balances and the potential to accrue meal debt, the Achieve Language Academy food and nutrition department will:

- A.** send out low balance notices prior to students needing to charge meals
 - 1.** ALA will alert families when their student's balance reaches \$10 so that the family can send additional funds.
- B.** notify and/or work with principals, school counselors, and/or teachers to understand the student and parent's situation and if a school meal application is needed;
- C.** use automated calling system to notify parents of negative balances; and
- D.** use automated email alerts to notify parents of negative balances.

Achieve Language Academy accepts multiple methods of payment for school meal balances, including online payments and in-person using cash or check.

V. COLLECTING UNPAID MEAL DEBT

All communication regarding unpaid meal debt shall be directed at parents or guardians. Schools may send children home with a letter in an unmarked envelope if it is distributed discreetly through normal school communication channels with families.

Prior to contacting households regarding unpaid meal debt, the school district shall ensure that the student is not participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, or other federal programs, which would confer categorical eligibility for free school meals, or is not homeless, migrant, or in foster care, and would allow them to be certified without an application.

Any household with a negative school lunch account balance shall be contacted by school nutrition staff by email, phone, or letter home to provide information on how to apply for free or reduced-price school meals or to add funds to the school nutrition account. ALA does not use a collection agency for meal debt. The Food Service Manager is responsible for contacting families with negative balances in order to collect the money owed.



For households that cannot afford to pay their school meal charges, the school district will work with them to establish a payment plan. Households that are subsequently certified for free or reduced-price school meals at a point later in the school year shall not immediately be required to repay school meal debt accrued in that school year. The school district will submit retroactive claims for any meals charged to the household from the date of application to the date of certification, to the extent allowed by USDA guidance.

LEGAL REFERENCES:

MN Statute 124D.111 - School Meals Policies, Lunch Aid, Food Service Accounting

SP 23-2017: Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q & A

SP 46-2016: Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies

SP 47-2016: Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments