



School Meals Policy

Introduction

The Minnesota Free School Meals Program, signed into law on March 17, 2023, is a permanent program that provides state reimbursement to schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program so that students can have one breakfast and one lunch at no cost at school. This program is detailed in Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 124D.111, subdivision 1(c). Therefore, beginning July 1, 2023, debt resulting from a lack of funds for a reimbursable meal at school will no longer occur.

Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 124D.111, subdivision 1 requires all schools in Minnesota that participate in the School Nutrition Programs to have a school meals policy*. The policy must, at minimum, meet the requirements outlined in the statute language but can contain additional language to address other local situations. Specific points that must be addressed in the policy are the following:

- The policy must be in writing and clearly communicate student meal charges when payment cannot be collected at the point of service. The policy must be reasonable and well-defined and maintain the dignity of students by prohibiting lunch shaming or otherwise ostracizing the student.
- The policy must address whether the participant uses a collections agency to collect unpaid school meals debt.
- The policy must ensure that once a participant has placed a meal on a tray or otherwise served the meal to a student, the meal may not be subsequently withdrawn from the student by the cashier or other school official, whether or not the student has an outstanding meals balance.
- The policy must ensure that a student who has been determined eligible for free and reduced-price lunch must always be served a reimbursable meal even if the student has an outstanding debt.
- If a school contracts with a third party for its meal services, it must provide the vendor with its school meals policy. Any contract between the school and a third-party provider entered into or modified after July 1, 2021, must ensure that the third-party provider adheres to the participant's school meals policy.

*[SP 23-2017 Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Question and Answer](#) clarifies that there is no Federal requirement for school board approval of the local meal charge policy. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 124D.111 states that each participant must adopt and post to its website, a school meals policy. School Food Authorities (SFAs) should consult with local administrators regarding the need for official school board approval.

Sample Policy Language

The following is only sample language. SFAs have the discretion to customize the policy to reflect local practices and conditions, as long as the SFA-level policy does not contradict the overarching Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 124D.111.

School Meals Policy

Policy (Purpose)

Sample Verbiage:

Nett Lake Elementary School participates in the Minnesota Free School Meals program as outlined in [Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 124D.111, subdivision 1](#). In addition, this policy is to ensure that school district employees, families and students have an understanding of the expectations regarding unpaid meal charges.

Meal Service

Sample verbiage:

Nett Lake Elementary School participates in the Minnesota Free School Meals Program, and therefore all enrolled students will be offered one breakfast and one lunch at no charge while at school regardless of an outstanding meal balance. All reimbursable meals offered meet state and federal guidelines. We will not provide an alternate meal unless related to a dietary need.

Point of Service

For Nett Lake Elementary School to receive State and Federal reimbursement for meals served, each student must be identified at the point of service.

Each Student is counted individually as they collect their trays.

All students will be treated respectfully and in accordance with [Minnesota Statute 2024, section 124D.111, subdivision 5](#).

Payment for A La Carte and Extra Entrees will not be allowed at the Point of Service.

(This is a local decision and may depend on nonprogram food sales.)

Individuals may buy tickets for lunch at the front desk in the main administrative office. They are then given to the kitchen supervisor (cook) as they are used.

Nonprogram Food Sales

To meet the non-program food revenue requirement, the nutrition program must charge and accrue revenue for items outside of the reimbursable breakfast and lunch it chooses to sell.

Sample verbiage:

Nonprogram Food Sales are any food or beverage sold outside of the reimbursable meal.

Choose one of the following:

- a) *Nett Lake Elementary School does not allow students to purchase food, beverage or second meals in addition to the reimbursable meal(s).*

We do not offer alternatives to our meals to be bought because the school's annual attendance is low and the community is considered "low income".

Unpaid Meal Charges

Prior year unpaid meal charges

The Minnesota Free Meals Program does not address debt incurred before the program's implementation.

Choose one of the following or insert your local process:

- a) *Nett Lake Elementary School will continue to utilize its local process for addressing delinquent meal accounts.*

We will directly deal with our students who have a delinquent account.

School Nutrition Funds cannot be used to repay previous years' debts per 2 CFR Part 200.426.

Current year unpaid meal charges

The Minnesota Free School Meals Program pertains only to reimbursable meals.

Communication Policy

Sample verbiage:

This policy and any pertinent supporting information will be provided in writing (i.e., mail, email, back-to-school packet, student handbook, etc.) to:

- *All households before the start of each school year;*
- *Students and families who transfer into the school district, at the time of enrollment*
- *All school district personnel who are responsible for enforcing this policy.*

Nett Lake Elementary School will post this policy on the school district's website, in addition to providing the required written notification described above.

Sample verbiage when contracting with a Food Service Management Company or Vended Meal Provider

Nett Lake Elementary School will ensure that any third-party provider with whom the school district enters into either an original or modified contract after July 1, 2021, adheres to the school district's school meals policy.

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Nondiscrimination Statement

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1. **mail:**
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. **fax:**
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. **email:**
Program.Intake@usda.gov

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