

HOPKINS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Parent/Guardian Meal Plan

1. Purpose

The goal of Hopkins Public Schools is to provide student access to nutritious no- or low-cost meals each school day. To ensure that a pupil whose parent/guardian has unpaid school meals fees is not shamed or treated differently than a pupil whose parent/guardian does not have unpaid meal fees.

Unpaid charges place a large financial burden on our school. The purpose of this policy is to insure compliance with federal requirements for the USDA Child Nutrition Program; and to provide oversight and accountability for the collection of outstanding student meal balances to ensure that the student is not stigmatized, distressed, or embarrassed.

The intent of this policy is to establish procedures to address unpaid meal charges throughout Hopkins Public Schools in a way that does not stigmatize, distress, or embarrass students. The provisions of this policy pertain to regular priced reimbursable school breakfast and lunch. Hopkins Public Schools provides this policy as a courtesy to those students in the event that they forget or lose their money. Charging of items outside of the reimbursable meals (a la carte items, adult meals, etc.) is expressly prohibited.

2. Policy

Free Meal Benefit – Free eligible students will be allowed to receive one free breakfast and lunch meal of their choice each day. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Reduced Meal Benefit – Reduced eligible students will be allowed to receive one breakfast and lunch meal of their choice at a reduced charge. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Full Pay Students – Students will pay for meals at the school's published paid meal rate each day. The charged meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals available to all students, unless the student's parent/guardian has specifically provided written permission to the school to withhold a meal. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

ONGOING STAFF TRAINING

- Staff will be trained annually and throughout the year as needed on the procedures for managing meal charges.
- Staff training includes ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.

PARENT NOTIFICATION

- Parents/guardians will be notified that a student's meal account balance is exhausted and has accrued meal charges within **1** day of the charge and then every **3** days thereafter.

PARENT OUTREACH

- Staff will communicate with parents/guardians with five or more meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals.
- School staff will make two documented attempts to reach out to parents/guardians to complete a meal application in addition to the application and instructions provided in the school enrollment packet.
- School staff will contact the parent/guardian to offer assistance with completion of the meal application to determine if there are other issues with the household causing the child to have insufficient funds, offering any other assistance that is appropriate.

MINIMIZING STUDENT DISTRESS

- School will not publicly identify or stigmatize any student on the line or discuss any outstanding meal debt in the presence of any other student
- Students who incur meal charges will not be required to wear a wristband, hand stamp, or do work to pay for meals.
- Schools will not throw away a meal after it has been served because of the student's inability to pay for the meal or because of previous meal charges.
- Schools will not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid school meal fees.
- Schools will deal directly with parents/guardians regarding unpaid meal fees.

ONGOING ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

- School staff will conduct direct certification with MDHHS to maximize free eligibility. MDHHS provides updated direct certification data monthly.
- School staff will provide parents/guardians with a free and reduced price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year in school enrollment packet.
- Schools using electronic meal application will provide an explanation of the process in the school enrollment packet and instructions on how to request a paper application at no cost.
- School will provide at least two additional free and reduced price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.

- Schools will use administrative prerogative judiciously, only after using exhaustive efforts to obtain a completed application from the parent/guardian only with available information on family size and income that falls within approvable guidelines.
- Schools will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, runaway coordinator to certify eligible students. School liaisons required for homeless, foster and migrant students will coordinate with the food service department to make sure such students receive free school meals in accordance with federal law.

Students/parents/guardians may pay for meals in advance via **hopkins.familyportal.com** , cash, or check made payable to **HPS food service**. Further details are available on the Hopkins webpage at **hpsvikings.org**. Funds should be maintained in accounts to minimize the possibility that a child may be without meal money on any given day. Any remaining funds for a particular student will be carried over to the next school year.

Refunds for withdrawn and graduating students; a written or e-mailed request for a refund of any money remaining in their account must be submitted. Students who are graduating at the end of the year will be given the option to transfer to a sibling's account.

Unclaimed funds must be requested within one school year. Unclaimed funds will then become the property of Hopkins Public Schools Food Service Program.