

HF 2467 Student Meal Debt Q & A

Does this apply to Breakfast?

Yes, breakfast is a reimbursable meal.

Does this apply to A La Carte?

The bill does not speak to a la carte sales. Therefore, this is a local decision and the local school board should set clear policy if they wish.

If a student has a negative balance but has cash in hand, would it be acceptable to not allow cash purchases of the a la carte items?

There is nothing that prohibits limitations on a la carte purchases. A written policy defining local practice should be distributed to all and applied consistently. Any policy that is adopted should be reviewed by legal counsel to determine if it falls within fair debt collection practices.

What is the flexibility account?

In Iowa Code 298A.2 the flexibility account within the General Fund was created. The 2017-18 school year was the first year of establishing a flexibility account. There are four specific fund sources identified that may be moved to the flexibility account if statutory requirements for the funds are met. The resulting pot of money may be used for 7 identified purposes. HF2467 added individual meal debt as one of those purposes. This movement of funds is not required, but can be a decision by the local LEA.

Since served trays cannot be taken away, how do we stop a student with a negative balance from going through the line and filling a tray?

If possible, move the point-of-sale to the beginning of the line. If a student continues to select a meal, administration or counselors may need to converse with the student who is not following a policy.

If the local policy does not allow purchases of a la carte with a negative balance, can a la carte items be removed from a lunch tray? Or can the student be asked to take the items off the tray?

The plain language of this statute indicates a purpose to prevent overt identification of the student with a negative balance in their meal account. Removing items from the tray would identify the student as a debtor.

If parents have provided a written request to not allow their child to charge a meal and the child fills a tray, can the tray be taken away?

No, the tray may not be taken away.

How are we required to do the second notification of the availability of applications for meal benefits?

The parent or guardian of all enrolled students can be notified of the availability of application for free or reduced-price meals by letter or electronic means. The notification does not have to be separate, but may be included with another communication going to all households.

To avoid confusion it is recommended to include a statement to the effect that if a student is already receiving meal benefits, no additional action is necessary.

Keep a record of how and when the two notices are provided to parents and guardians. A suggestion would be to keep it with the income applications for easy review.

Is a second notification required for schools participating in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)?

School buildings participating in CEP do not offer Meal Eligibility Applications to their students because eligibility for free meals is determined based on direct certification. A second notice is not required for students in these buildings.

What are some examples of discreetly providing information to a student about their account?

At the point of service a verbal notification of a low or negative balance may be provided in a quiet conversational tone directly to the individual student.

If letters concerning account balances are sent home they should be 1. Addressed to the parents by name or "To the parent(s)/guardian(s) of (child's name)", 2. All be the same format (e.g. no separate color for negative balance versus a balance approaching zero), 3. Closed for privacy.

Can a list of PIN numbers without names be posted?

If a confidential PIN number is assigned for use only in the school meal program and is not the same or a part of any other ID number used by the student for school purposes, a list of PIN numbers for accounts with negative balances may be posted.

How is the unpaid meal donation account set up?

This is a fund set up within the nutrition fund. Additional information will be provided about coding these funds by the Iowa Department of Education school finance team. A best practice would be to log deposits and payouts for auditing purposes.

Do you have to notify parents or guardians of donations?

There is nothing that would require notification or limiting notification.

What do you do if someone wants to give funds for a la carte for free students?

It is a local decision on accepting and/or distributing funds for a la carte, but need to be applied fairly and equally.

An alternate meal made up of items available to all students – what does that look like?

Any school meal in the cafeteria should be made up of items available to all students. You may not offer a food, e.g. cheese sandwich or bag of baby carrots, only to those students with a negative balance.

Do I have to wait until they owe more than 5 meals to contact them about the negative balance?

No, a school may communicate with the parent or guardian as identified in the local policy.

With the income setoff as outlined in Iowa Code Section 8A.504, subsection 2 now available, can we request parent Social Security Numbers?

A school district is not required to collect this information nor are they prohibited from asking for it. A social security number is not a required part of registration. If you are considering asking for this Personally Identifiable Information, you must comply with Iowa Code Chapter 22 to maintain this confidential information securely.