

BOARD BRIEF

Date: February 21, 2020

BOARD INFORMATION: X

MEETING PREPARATION:

FROM: Cynthia R. Hormel, Director of School Nutrition Services

THROUGH: Mignon R. Anthony, Chief of Operations, and
Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Cindy Anderson, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Lunch Balances

ACPS 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

Goal 2: Family and Community Engagement
Goal 5: Health and Wellness
Goal 6: Effective and Efficient Operations

SY 2019-2020 FOCUS AREA:

Focus Area 2: Budget Process

FY 2020 BUDGET PRIORITY:

Communications and Customer Service for External Stakeholders
Mental and Social/Emotional Health
Nutrition Programs
Communications and Customer Service for Internal Stakeholders

SUMMARY:

School Nutrition Services (SNS) notifies the school Principals daily of any unpaid meal charges. We find that methods of building level approaches to communicating and working with families regarding unpaid meal charges varies by school.

In addition to building level communications, SNS uses several approaches in communicating to parents/guardians directly regarding their student's debt. For example, automated robo-calls are sent twice weekly, including text message and voice message. Parents/guardians may also receive an email if the information is available in the Student Information System. Lastly, before winter break, families with meal debt receive a notification via US Postal Service mail.

Free and Reduced Meal Applications (FARM) must be renewed annually. The Federal Government regulations allow a 45-day grace period for students to renew their application. If a parent/guardian does not complete the application prior to the established grace date their student(s) who qualified for FARM are then moved to a paying status. The Federal Government guidelines do not provide any provision for us to make these meals retroactive. In many cases, the debt remains on the student account for the parent(s)/guardian(s) to pay. Building Leadership Team may also complete a FARM application on behalf of a student when other methods have failed and they believe it is warranted.

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In addition, we continue to capitalize on the many Federal programs, where applicable, that allow our students a free breakfast and a free lunch meal.

BACKGROUND:

Unpaid meal debt is a real struggle that many School Nutrition Programs face nationwide and one we face here at Alexandria City Public Schools. Our current charge policy allows students to charge both breakfast and lunch meals, but no a la carte meal purchases. Students are never denied a meal and are always allowed to purchase the complete meal regardless of their current negative meal account balance.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review this brief for informational purposes.

ATTACHMENTS:

None

CONTACT:

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