

IMPORTANT POINTS REGARDING GFPS FOOD SERVICES AND NEW POLICIES

June, 2017

Food Service Philosophy Statements

- The goal of the School Meal Programs is to provide nutritious meals to students during the school day so they have proper nutrition to enhance learning.
- GFPS Food Service staff work hard to ensure every student has access to the nutrition they need to succeed.
- School nutrition professionals are passionate about ensuring students have access to healthy school meals to support academic achievement. We never want to see a child go hungry or feel any shame during mealtime.

Free or Reduced Food Service Eligibility

- Children may receive breakfast and lunch at no cost to them if they are categorically eligible for free meals or if they qualify for free meals based on Federal poverty guidelines.
 - Great Falls School District works diligently to enroll all eligible students in the free or reduced price meal program:
 - Each year we receive a list of students who categorically qualify for SNAP and TANF benefits in GFPS. We work to automatically qualify those students currently enrolled in the district prior to starting school each year. This is called “direct certification”.
 - GFPS contacts news media outlets in August to inform parents that new applications are being accepted and are required to be completed each school year if they are not directly certified by their enrollment in SNAP or TANF benefits.
 - Notification of is also sent home with students the first week of school with instructions on completing an online application or obtaining a paper application at each school or the district food service office for those who might be eligible for free or reduced status.
 - Foodservice staff are available at the schools for Back-to-School nights to greet parents, help with the application process and collect money to put on their students accounts. The application information is also on the GFPS website under <http://gfpsweb.weebly.com/foods-home.html>.

Food Service Funding

- The GFPS Food Service program has its own budget and receives no operational funds from GFPS general funds.
- GFPS seeks to balance the desire to provide meals for hungry children lacking the means to pay with the community demands of maintaining the financial viability of our school food service operation
- Federal reimbursements cover the cost of meals for students qualified and enrolled in the free meal program. Federal reimbursements cover a portion for those qualifying for reduced meals.
- School meal programs charge non-eligible/enrolled students to pay for food and labor costs of the meals they consume.
- Unpaid school meal debt can become a critical problem, and if left unaddressed, can impact the quality of meals for all students and impact other district non-federal funds. At one time in GFPS, unpaid meal debt was over \$40,000. Through the deployment of a variety of strategies, it now averages approximately \$13,000.

- The USDA recently issued regulations mandating that schools implement unpaid meal policies by the start of the 2017/18 school year and that schools must make efforts to collect debt incurred from unpaid meals. (www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/unpaid-meal-charges)

2017-2018 Breakfast and Lunch Prices

BREAKFAST PRICES

Regular	\$1.55
Reduced	\$0.30

LUNCH PRICES

Grades K-6

Regular	\$2.50
Reduced	\$0.40

Grades 7-12

Regular	\$2.60
Reduced	\$0.40

Customer Service Information

- Procedures are in place to eliminate any stigma associated with free or reduced price meals. The computerized cashier program does not identify students by status in any way and students enter their ID numbers and go through the line whether they are full pay or receive free or reduced benefits. The same meal options are available to all students in the cafeterias.
- See points above regarding outreach to parents for free/reduced applications.
- GFPS provides an online platform for parents called *myschoolbucks.com*.
 - Parents and students (full pay or reduced pay) are able to sign up at *myschoolbucks.com* to check their account balances at any time to know if they are in need of funds on their accounts.
 - Parents and students can sign up an email notification when their account reaches a low balance of their choice. For example, an email could be set to notify them when they have \$5.00 remaining on their account.
 - Meal payments are accepted via *myschoolbucks.com* or with a check payable to the GFPS Food Services.
- GFPS sends low and negative balance notices home with elementary and middle school students weekly.
 - The elementary note informs that the child will need to bring money or a meal, or they will be provided a designated menu alternative at no charge.
- Schools attempt to call parents/ guardians to inform them that their child/ren's account balance is low and/or in the negative. The effectiveness of the call is dependent upon having active phone numbers, parents taking the call and/or listening to the message.
- If a student is without meal money or maintains a negative balance on a consistent basis, the administration will investigate the situation more closely and take further action as needed.
 - If a financial hardship exists, parents and families are encouraged to apply for free or reduced price meals for their child.
 - In the event a family is in need of further assistance, there are school pantries designated at each school and there are programs and community resources available to help

families. Parents should contact their school administrator for support.

Charging and Alternate Meal Information

- Full Pay and Reduced Enrolled K-6 Students:
 - Notification regarding account balances are provided to parents as indicated above.
 - Students may charge up to \$10 in meals (breakfast and lunch combined).
 - Once the limit is reached:
 - The principal is notified and makes another contact with parents.
 - The student is offered a menu alternate at no charge which is typically a cheese sandwich. The alternate meal may be altered depending on dietary needs of individual students.
- Full Pay and Reduced Enrolled 7-8 Students:
 - Notification regarding account balances are provided to parents as indicated above.
 - May charge up to \$10 in meals (breakfast and lunch combined).
 - Once the limit is reached:
 - Student may request a lunch voucher from the office for a regular lunch.
 - Parents are to repay the school for the voucher.
 - The principal is notified and makes another contact with parents.
- Full Pay and Reduced Enrolled 9-12 Students must pay at the cash register with either cash, a credit balance in their account, or a voucher from the school office.
 - The cashier will notify the principal with names of students who violate this rule.
 - The principal will investigate and take appropriate action.
- In all cases, students receiving an alternate meal or securing a voucher from the office will be treated with dignity and respect.