

## District 2 Implements New Food Service Guidelines for Students with Delinquent Accounts

Written by Administrator

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Scott County School District 2 recently implemented new food service guidelines for students with delinquent accounts. The implementation was delayed until Monday, September 23, so that ample notification could be provided to families of SCSD2 and so that specific notifications could be provided to the families of those children who were projected to be impacted on the implementation date of September 23.

As a result of some public mis-perception about the food service guidelines, SCSD2 officials met and discussed the food service guidelines at length at the recent board meeting on September 24, 2013.

First and foremost, SCSD2 officials want the public and community to know that it takes three weeks with a negative balance before a student will be served an alternative lunch. Once a child's account becomes negative, school officials make calls to families of affected students and in addition, the family gets an automated call daily until the lunch account is paid. School officials chose the three week grace period to give families time to get the account balance back into the positive. As we know, most working people only get paid every two weeks and thus that would provide the family time once they received their paycheck to make amends with their student's lunch account.

On September 6, the SCSD2 Food Service department identified approximately 200 students who would be affected by the new food service guidelines. Personal calls were attempted on all 200 students' families to inform them that their students' accounts were currently negative and of the consequences of the new food service policy on September 23 should the account remain negative. As a result of these efforts of SCSD2 personnel, SCSD2 only served, district-wide, 27 alternative lunches on Monday, and that number was down to 17 alternative lunches as of Tuesday. Thus, many of the SCSD2 families are taking the necessary steps to provide for their students breakfast and lunch needs. "Based on the efforts of our food service staff, we have seen an incredible response by most of our parents to make sure that their students' lunch accounts are in the black so that their children are not impacted by the new food service guidelines. However, one child is still one child too many to be on the alternative lunch plan and school officials, school board members, and the local community will continue to work together to find a solution. Albeit, that solution is very difficult because we cannot force nor require families in need to fill out the necessary paperwork for federal or local assistance", stated Dr. Marc Slaton, Scott County School District 2 Superintendent.

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The change in the food service guidelines was a direct result of a State Board of Accounts Audit and how schools are now allowed to write off yearly accounts that never get paid. Previously, school districts were able to use Food Service dollars to write off any delinquent accounts at the end of the year. Now, with the change in federal and state policy towards these local delinquent accounts, schools must use General Fund money to write off these yearly accounts. On average over the last several years, Scott County School District 2 would have to write off \$80,000 in delinquent accounts yearly. Dr. Slaton added, "We were very frustrated with the State Board of Accounts last audit that required us to no longer use our Food Service dollars to write off the delinquent accounts. We understand the rationale behind it. However, it requires school districts to take more drastic measures such as the one that we implemented recently, and as a result, there will be some children who will be served alternative lunches. Their position, per our last audit, is that local school districts are not allowed to take federal money (what subsidizes the student food programs) to offset what they are deeming as a local problem with parents who do not pay their student's bills."

Dr. Slaton continued, "Offsetting an \$80,000 dollar loss out of general fund would impact other educational programs and could ultimately lead to the loss of multiple teaching jobs or other important support staff personnel that make our schools great." SCSD2 started looking at Food Service guidelines from around the region last spring and discussed these throughout the Spring and early Summer before deciding to go with the

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current food service guidelines. SCSD2 officials and school board members were able to take the parts of different guidelines from around the region to develop the guidelines that were recently implemented. SCSD2 officials and board members are also currently working out the details of a Scott County School District 2 scholarship program for those families who are just above the federal assistance qualification line yet do not have the family income to keep their students' food accounts in the positive. Officials are working on finalizing these guidelines in the very near future. However, to qualify for the SCSD2 scholarship program, families would still need to fill out financial assistance paperwork with the SCSD2 Business Office. Members of the community may donate money to this scholarship program. If someone wishes to make a donation to this scholarship fund, they may do so by mailing a check to SCSD2 Scholarship Lunch Fund, 375 East McClain Avenue, Scottsburg, Indiana 47170, or they may drop off the

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money at the same location.

Scott County School District 2 strongly encourages any family that is struggling to make ends meet to please take the time to fill out the Federal Assistance Paperwork and to submit it to the SCSD2 Business Office. A decision on these assistance requests can be processed the same day. These forms can be obtained by contacting the SCSD2 Business Office at (812) 752-8921. By having more families complete the financial assistance paperwork, it will help SCSD2 help more families

either through the federal free and reduced lunch program or the Scott County School District 2 Scholarship Lunch Program.

A daily breakfast costs \$1.10 and lunch costs \$2.10. Together, the cost to eat two meals a day at school is \$3.20. During the course of a year, a family not on the federal assistance program will pay \$576.00 per student for 2 meals a day for 180 school days.

Dr. Slaton concluded, "We want our community to know that our team at Scott County School District 2 from board members through all areas of our staff will continue to study this issue and work on a solution that will work for the most kids possible. We hope that our community will step forward and work with us to develop a solution that will help us alleviate the burden from our students as we all know how important good, healthy nutrition is for these children to learn. We hope that our families will take the time to fill out the necessary paperwork to see if they qualify for federal assistance, and if they do not qualify for federal assistance, then perhaps they would qualify for the local scholarship assistance. Working together we can do a lot of good for our children. I've seen this community rise to the occasion for their children time and again through the great community efforts already in place."