

## MEMORANDUM

Date: August 21, 2014

To: Superintendents and Food Service Directors

From: Commissioner Brenda Cassellius

**RE: Meal Payment Reminders and Student Fees**

The 2014 Legislature passed legislation that addresses school meal payment reminders. Specifically, the statute reads, “The participant must also ensure that any reminders for payment of outstanding student meal balances do not demean or stigmatize any child participating in the school lunch program.”

The Governor and Legislature have been very clear that **every student** should have access to a healthy meal and that collecting and asking for meal payments should be done in a **respectful** manner. We understand that there may still be questions about what notification methods could “demean or stigmatize” a child. In terms of providing clear guidance or protocols, MDE believes that districts are in the best position to understand their school communities’ attitudes, beliefs and cultural sensitivities. A few guiding principles **we encourage you to consider** when developing a local protocol are:

1. Consider communicating about payments with parents directly, not through children. A parent’s inability to pay a bill should not be a burden upon a child. Many districts use automated notifications through voice messages, texts or emails when balances are low or negative. This is very efficient, and eliminates the potential for demeaning a child.
2. We strongly discourage the use of physical reminders, such as hand stamps, as it can be embarrassing for students.
3. Every school or district has existing processes for collecting payment for school functions, activities and programs. Consider using similar protocols for meal payment reminders.
4. Please review the [Meal Policy Guidance](#) issued to superintendents in February 2014 for additional information on meal policies.

Please also note that the [Minnesota Public School Fee Law](#) establishes that no pupil shall be denied an education because of economic inability, and prohibits fees for supplies needed to complete educational requirements necessary for graduation. It also states that withholding grades or diplomas for unpaid fees denies pupils their right to equal protection and entitled privileges. The law recognizes that school boards do have the right to accept voluntary contributions, to establish extracurricular and noncurricular fees, and to waive those fees when circumstances would prohibit a child from participating in important activities. In order to provide a free and appropriate public education, **please review your school fee policies to ensure that you are not unfairly denying educational privileges to students.**

For more information about the department’s guidance on meal policies, please contact Deb Lukkonen at 651-582-8228 or at [debra.j.lukkonen@state.mn.us](mailto:debra.j.lukkonen@state.mn.us).