

**GRAND FORKS SCHOOL BOARD
CNP LUNCH ACCOUNT PROCEDURE COMMITTEE
GRAND FORKS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT #1
MEETING MINUTES
May 23, 2018**

A meeting of the Grand Forks School Board CNP Lunch Account Procedure Committee was held on Wednesday, May 23, 2018, at the Mark Sanford Education Center with Eric Lunn presiding.

Committee Members Present: Board Members Eric Lunn, Katie Dachtler, Alma Pierce, Child Nutrition Program (CNP) Director Emily Karel, Business Manager Ed Gerhardt, Principals Todd Selk and David Saxberg, Social Worker Jennifer Modeen, and Cook Managers Brenda Newman, Kathy Sauvageau, and Debbie Watts.

Committee Members Absent: GFAFB School Board Liaison.

Others Present: Meeting Secretary Cindy Johnson.

Call to Order. The meeting was called to order at 5:32 p.m.

Child Nutrition Program Lunch Account Procedure. Karel handed out documents that were used in the April 9, 2018 Grand Forks School Board meeting and gave a history of how this topic came to a committee.

Dachtler joined the meeting at 5:34 p.m.

Lunn explained the school board's concerns were 1) having children identified by being different by having a non-choice meal, 2) sending an unpaid account to a collection agency, and 3) reporting parents to Child Protective Services (CPS).

Pierce questioned why there was a difference in the negative balance threshold between the elementary and secondary schools. She wanted all students to be treated the same. Modeen preferred consistency no matter the age of the student.

Dachtler recommended not filing CPS reports. She explained that they would likely get set aside because they do not rise to the level of abuse, they would cause extra time and expense

in the social services department, and the report could rise to the level of a false accusation.

Lunn explained that School Board Member Meggen Sande was concerned with students not getting a hot meal of their choice if their account was in arrears. He stated that he had concerns for this because of the cost. Lunn also stated his concerns about turning the account over to a collection agency.

Karel stated that she, too, had concerns about using a collection agency. She reported that since the first school board meeting when this topic was discussed, several donations were received by the Grand Forks Foundation for Education, which have been used when a student has reached his/her charge limit. She noted that unpaid meals have nearly tripled from March to April and that it was mostly at the elementary level and mostly between 1-3 students. System-wide, the overall cost was not a lot (currently at around \$2,000); however, it has definitely increased.

Modeen explained that typically, if a student was having trouble paying for a sustained amount of time; it typically meant that something else was going on. Barriers that families often have include having too much pride to apply for free and reduced meals, thinking it is just a temporary situation and they will work through it, or they have feelings of embarrassment. Dachtler added that the application is difficult to complete.

Karel explained that there is a USDA policy that requires Child Nutrition to have an end-all statement regarding payment of lunch accounts in its policy and that the policy be published.

Watts reported that since procedures no longer allow hand stamps or sending a card, some families at her school say that they are unaware that their student's lunch account balance was low or overspent. She also reported that families miss the hand stamp reminder and that there was never any embarrassment by a student when receiving a hand stamp; in fact,

some students wanted the stamp on their forehead.

In response to questions from Selk, Karel stated that there were situations when a student could be certified for free and reduced meals if they have never filed the application; however, it is rarely done and the federal officials do not like when certification is done this way.

Newman reported that she did not see the reactions in her school or in the lunch line that she is hearing in the media. She does not see students getting upset or anybody making fun of a student who may be getting a soybutter sandwich. What she does see sometimes when a student receives a soybutter sandwich is the next student sharing a part of their meal with that student. There is no embarrassment on the students' part. If giving a soybutter sandwich, it has been thoroughly discussed in advance and discretely given. Counselors and social workers are sometimes involved. Newman added that it was not always only about the money. Sometimes parents put a limit on their student's account. Sometimes when a student has overspent his/her account and the parent is informed, the parent's response is that there is a lesson for the student to learn in how they manage their lunch fund.

Sauvageau reported that at her high school, she has never given the option of a soybutter sandwich and that the student always comes a day or two later with the money that he/she owes.

Watts stated that the soybutter sandwich was not a bad meal. Karel reported that 34,000 soybutter sandwich meals were served by student choice this year. Sauvageau reported that when the soybutter sandwich is offered at the high school, it is the first sandwich to go. Karel stated that if the district went with a non-choice meal, she would not go to the next step. She suggested either stopping meal charging and giving an alternate meal, or continuing to build up unpaid bills and ultimately turn it over to a collection agency.

Modeen stated that 99% of the time, parents want to take care of the bill themselves. People may think parents want the bill written off, but the vast majority of parents are responsible no matter where they are on the

poverty line. It was not just about a parent not wanting to pay their bill; instead, it was usually another issue.

Karel stated that graduating seniors could not pick up their caps/gowns if they owed lunch money. Negative account balances are rolled over to the next school year and where CNP is caught is when a family leaves the district before graduation. Last year the unpaid balance that CNP rolled into the next year was \$940.

Everyone agreed that turning an account over to a collection agency was not a good option. It affects the credit record, does not build trust, and can have a lifelong affect.

Modeen suggested setting a limit on the amount that may be charged and then giving a grace period before limiting the food choice to a soybutter sandwich meal. Newman suggested a lower limit was more achievable to be paid off. She added that she deals with the same three families all year and that they bring in just enough money to stay below the limit. She added that some students do not charge and sit in the cafeteria without eating because they refuse offers from others to buy their lunch. Watts reported that she explains to her students the differences in meal options from elementary to secondary school and that they will have to pay more when they are at the secondary level.

Dachtler stated that by giving students a choice the district was taking on some of the debt, but the district was also alleviating teachers and other groups from having to provide for student meals from their own pockets. She felt there was a way the district could provide students with a meal of their choice. Karel clarified that eating lunch at school was a choice and that students could bring their own lunch from home.

Pierce suggested that contacting CPS be removed, turning unpaid bills to a collection agency be removed, and making the negative balance threshold the same for all schools.

Lunn requested Karel re-write the CNP policy with the changes discussed herein and the committee could look at it again.

Cook Managers commented that because of changes Karel has made this year, many problems have become nonexistent, and that what is reported in the news media is in the past.

Adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 6:29 p.m.

APPROVED _____
(Date)

Eric Lunn, Committee Chair