

Providing school meals and being fiscally responsible

Dear Edmonds School District Community:

Thank you so much for your efforts and contributions to the successful start of our 2008-09 school year! In whatever capacity you have contributed, your interest and support of our students has made a difference. That is why we would like to make sure you have facts regarding a change we have made concerning IOUs and our Food Services Department.

We have set a limit to the amount of money an individual student can owe for school meals. That limit is now \$10. At the start of this school year, we had just over \$200,000 in accumulated debt for unpaid meals for nearly 2,000 students from the 2007-08 school year. Communication to these families occurred last school year, over the summer, and now at the start of the current school year. This communication has included mailed letters and voicemails.

We feel strongly this is neither the fault nor the responsibility of any child. Providing healthy and nutritious meals is and will always be our goal and 10,000 breakfasts and lunches are served daily at 34 schools. We are trying to strike a balance between compassion and our fiscal responsibility to all taxpayers and parents to operate our food program as a break-even operation. This does not have to do with the budget reductions we have made or may be making. The Food Service Program operates separate from the General Fund.

We are continuing to recoup the funds owed to food service and are seeing success, with approximately 25 percent of the total amount owed repaid in the first five days school has been in session. As of the start of this school year, we have 1,747 students approved for free or reduced meals (1,115 free; 632 reduced). This is a significant increase over the number last year at this time.

A student whose account is beyond the \$10 maximum (they can receive three full lunches before reaching the maximum), is receiving either a cheese sandwich at lunch or a muffin at breakfast. If that child brings money for that days meal or meals they are provided the full meal options. We are continuing to closely monitor this at each building and principals are making plans to work confidentially with the households that remain to carry forward balances to ensure any steps that can be taken to assist the families with ways they can address this debt.

Prior to the 2004-05 school year, no amount of money could be owed; IOUs were not accepted. Secondary age students with no money for that day's meal received no food; a sandwich was provided to elementary students. Beginning with the 2004-05 school year, we established an Emergency Feeding Program that allowed for IOUs, and have seen a steady increase in the number of unpaid meals at the end of each school year. That could not continue. We are delicately and compassionately as possible taking the steps outlined above to ensure we can continue to operate a fiscally responsible model for all students, families, and taxpayers.

We welcome any questions or thoughts you have on this and appreciate your continued efforts to support and as importantly, understand what the District is doing to support all students. If you have questions, please contact Marla Miller (millerm@edmonds.wednet.edu or 425-431-7036) or Sara Conroy (conroys@edmonds.wednet.edu or 425-43-7076).