

# Cooking up change

## SMNSD Board of Education votes to change lunch policy

A policy change, first proposed by SMNSD Food Services at the Sept. 24 board of education meeting, was voted into effect during the meeting on Oct. 8.

Currently, elementary and middle schoolers can charge up to three meals on their lunch account after the balance reaches zero; after that, they receive a cheese sandwich and milk in place of the regular lunch. High school students are not allowed to have a negative balance at all; when their account hits zero, they are automatically given the cheese sandwich and milk.

Now that this policy has been passed, it will allow students to continue receiving regular lunches all year, even if their account balance goes into the negative. The debt incurred will then be sent to a collections agency at the end of the school year, who will try to make the parents pay.

"There's been a lot of national attention on food shaming," Director of Food Services Nancy Coughenour said at the Sept. 24 board meeting. "Policy revision would ensure that all students be provided a regular meal regardless of the balance on their account."

SMNSD Nutritionist Jill Funk said this proposal was in reaction to the larger national movement.

"This topic has been discussed nationally, at the state level and our local level," Funk said. "The district is taking another look at our current practice and to evaluate it."

Some food service employees agree that students should be able to receive the regular lunch even when their account balance is negative.

"It's not good for the kids because they can't get what they want to eat if they don't have money," SMNSD North food service worker Tim Yeasin said. "Kids need their fruits and veggies."

However, members of the board of education raised concerns with the financial feasibility of the proposal. Currently, the district only has to pick up the cost of the cheese sandwiches given out throughout the year; this amounts to about \$9,000-12,000 per year. Once the new policy is implemented, the district will have to cover the remaining debt that the collections agency is not able to get from parents. In a trial of a similar policy in Denver, Colorado, the district had previously paid \$12,000-14,000 per year for cheese sandwiches and milk. After the new policy was introduced, the parental debt that the district had to cover at the end of the year was over \$300,000.

"I'm concerned fiscally about this, when I read,

especially, the article about Denver," board member Sara Goodburn said in the Sept. 24 meeting.

North sophomore Ruth Long agrees that the financial implications are a concern for the district.

"There are going to be a lot of people who can't pay off that debt later just because of their financial situations," Long said. "I don't think that's a good idea, it's not going to be a clean procedure."

However, the board has decided to adopt the program on a trial basis, agreeing to reevaluate the program by April 30, 2019.

"We've always been talking about how we can help children learn, and I believe this is a piece of the puzzle to help children learn," board member Patty Mach said at the Oct. 8 board meeting. "In my opinion, one more toasted cheese sandwich is one too many." story by Grace Altenhofen

### Forgot your lunch money?

#### **No problem!**

With the new policy change, no one has to worry about forgetting their lunch money. Students can get a regular, hot meal every day, regardless of whether they have money in their account to cover it.

### Still hungry after school?

SMNSD North's new after-school meal program begins Oct. 22. Any student can come by the cafeteria at 3 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesdays to receive a free sack meal.