

I Know You Bought Broccoli, but Did You Eat the Broccoli?

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By Al Campbell

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Al Campbell

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By AL CAMPBELL

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COURT HOUSE - What their K-12 pupils bought for breakfast or lunch will be a matter of on-line record for Middle Township parents when school opens Sept. 5.

Whether or not children ate what they bought - on average 1,200-1,300 meals a day in the district - will remain up to the child to reveal.

The child's menu items will remain on line for 30 days.

Dawn DeCamillo, Chartwells' district director of food services, made a presentation to the board of education at its Aug. 17 meeting.

An on-line account that allows parents to add funds directly from a bank account will be effective the first day of school, she said. "A computer and an Internet connection are all you need to keep accurate tabs on student's spending habits," states the Web site administered by Altoona, Pa.-based Food Service Solutions, Inc.

Chartwells, which provides the district's meals, paid the district \$35,000 this year as part of its service contract. Some of that money will be used to pay for computerized checkout equipment that will link the child's account direct to the cafeteria.

Eventually, parents will be able to use a credit card to put funds on their child's account, said DeCamillo.

While the online account will tell parents what food their children purchased, only at the high and middle schools will they be able to view what a la carte items were purchased, said DeCamillo.

In today's computerized society, where most homes are linked to the Internet, parents will have only to log on to www.myschoolaccount.com to add funds or see what their child ordered.

DeCamillo estimated it would take about 10 minutes for a parent to establish an account for one or all their children.

For those who still do not have a computer, checks or cash may still be used to replenish a child's meal account.

Gone are the days of lunch tickets, which were often lost or stolen. History, too, will be forgotten lunch money.

The new system, explained by letter to all district parents, takes care of that.

Vanished, too, is the embarrassment attached to children who get free or reduced-price lunches, said DeCamillo.

"That stigma was removed a long time ago," she said. "They have no idea who is buying full or reduced or free lunches."

Children use a personal identification (PIN) number and their student identification number (which stays with the pupil throughout their years in the district) to access the food account at the end of the cafeteria line.

DeCamillo said some parents asked last year about the system. If all else fails, or if parents lack a computer, cash will still work to pay for lunch, she said.

"With childhood obesity being what it is, parents will be able to interact with their children," said board member George DeLollis, who advocated the program.

"I think it's a solid program, and low cost to implement," he added.

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