

Online 'MealPay' plan gives parents control over lunch

Service makes for easy accounting, monitoring of kids' eating habits

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Parents now have the ability to gain more control of what fills their children's lunch plates.

The Clarksville-Montgomery County School System has started using an online service, MealPay, so parents can see to it their children are getting their daily dose of green beans and cauliflower.

The Web site, www.mealpayplus.com, documents purchases and allows parents to make deposits into their child's account from the Web site or by phone.



Clarksville-Montgomery County is the sixth district in Tennessee to begin using the program.

Susan Brock, assistant director of child nutrition, said they are pleased with the new service.

"It's a long way from punching a hole in a lunch ticket," she said.

Brock said they integrated the program because they realized there was a need.

"It has been challenging (for parents) to keep up with the (monetary) balance. They have to rely on their kids when they come home, which isn't always easy," she said. "I think (MealPay) will be a great benefit. It will give them that information at their fingertips."

Brock said that while the program allows parents to monitor what their children are eating, chances are their parents won't catch them eating junk food because this year the State set strict guidelines for grade school and middle school students' diets, restricting foods with high levels of sugar or fat content.

Students are given a choice of several USDA-approved items and must choose three of them per meal.

Students can select additional side items or double their portions at a higher cost, and parents are allowed to block this option when selecting the meal plan.

While students don't have access to junk food, problems can still arise, which Judy Adkins, an employee of the CMCSS Child Nutrition Department, found out from each of her children.

Her 13-year-old son, Brett, is underweight, she said, and she worries whether he eats enough.

"He's doing alright," she said, as she has kept an eye on his diet since she registered for the program a few weeks ago.

Her daughter, Jennifer, 15, has had a bad habit of selling her food to friends.

"I had been waiting for this for a long time," Adkins said about MealPay. "Now I can be sure they are getting what they should be getting."

Upon registration, parents are also given an option to receive an e-mail reminder if their child's account is nearly out of funds.

Brock said the school system also recently installed computer software upgrades that allow funds that remain in accounts at the end of a school year to roll into the next year's account.

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