

NUTRITION SERVICES: MEALS, MEAL CHARGING AND PROHIBITION AGAINST FOOD SHAMING

The RSU No. 5 Board or Directors recognizes that good nutrition is related to students' physical and social-emotional well-being and their readiness to learn. RSU No. 5 shall participate, as feasible, in the National School Breakfast and Lunch and other food programs that may be available. However, the Board also recognizes that unpaid meal charges impose a significant financial burden on RSU No. 5.

The provisions of this policy pertain to priced reimbursable school breakfasts and lunches. Items outside of reimbursable meals (e.g. a la carte items, adult meals) must be paid upon purchase or be prepaid; no charging will be permitted.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with federal requirements for the school unit's Child Nutrition Program, to provide oversight and accountability in the collection of outstanding student meal balances, and to ensure that students are not shamed or stigmatized for having unpaid meal charges.

MEAL BENEFITS

Students eligible for free meals will be allowed to receive a free breakfast and lunch meal of their choice each day.

Students eligible for reduced price meal benefits will be allowed to receive a breakfast or lunch meal of their choice each day at the reduced rate.

Full-pay students are expected to pay for meals at the school's published meal charge rate each day or in advance.

RSU No. 5 will provide such a meal to any student who requests the meal and is otherwise eligible for the meal regardless of the student's inability to pay for the school meal or failure in the past to pay for school meals. The student's meal account will be charged accordingly. Any meals charged to students under this section will be the same reimbursable meals available to all students.

PROHIBITION ON PUNISHMENT RELATED TO UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- A. Students with unpaid meal charges will not be required to do chores or work as a means of paying for one or more meals or as punishment for not paying for one or more meals.
- B. Staff will not require a student to throw away a meal after it has been served to the student.
- C. Staff will not refuse a meal to a student as a form of disciplinary action.
- D. Student debt will carry over from year to year. Contact will be made with the parent/guardian to recoup the debt.

PROHIBITION ON FOOD SHAMING AND STIGMATIZATION

The school will not openly identify or otherwise stigmatize a student who cannot pay for a meal or who has payments due for previous meals.

- A. Staff will not identify or stigmatize any student in line for a meal or discuss any outstanding meal debt in the presence of other students.
- B. A student with unpaid meal charges will not be required to wear a wristband or anything that differentiates him/her from other students.
- C. Staff communication about a student's meal debts must be made to the parent/ guardian of the student rather than directly to the student, except that if a student asks about their meal debt, staff may answer the student's inquiry. Staff may ask a student to carry to their parent/guardian a letter regarding the student's meal debt.

PARENT OUTREACH

The Nutrition Program will provide parents/guardians with a free and reduced price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year, including eligibility guidelines.

The Nutrition Program will provide additional information about free and reduced price applications to families identified as owing meal charges.

NOTIFICATION AND COLLECTION OF UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

The Nutrition Program will not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid meal charges.

The Nutrition Program will regularly notify a student's parent/guardian that the student has accrued meal charges.

The Nutrition Program will offer assistance with completion of the application and will use any available or necessary administrative/direct certification methods to maximize student eligibility for free and reduced price meals if the school's efforts to obtain a completed application from the parent/guardian have been exhausted. If the debt continues to remain unpaid, the school will follow such guidelines as may be developed by the Maine Department of Education for the collection of student meal debt, or take such action as deemed appropriate within the limits of applicable law and/or regulations.

Parents/guardians who are carrying a debt will have the debt forgiven if they complete the free and reduced lunch application.

Legal Reference: 20-A MRSA §6601-6602
20-A MRSA §6681

Adopted: April 28, 2010
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