

SUBJECT: MEAL CHARGING AND PROHIBITION AGAINST MEAL SHAMING

It is the District's goal to provide students with access to nutritious no- or low-cost meals each school day and to ensure that a student whose parent/guardian has unpaid meal charges is not shamed or treated differently than a student whose parent/guardian does not have unpaid meal charges.

Unpaid meal charges place a large financial burden on the District. The purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with federal requirements for the USDA Child Nutrition Program and to provide oversight and accountability for the collection of outstanding student meal balances to ensure that the student is not stigmatized, distressed, or embarrassed.

The intent of this policy is to establish procedures to address unpaid meal charges throughout the District in a way that does not stigmatize, distress, or embarrass students. The provisions of this policy pertain to regular priced reimbursable school breakfast, lunch and snack meals only. Charging of items outside of the reimbursable meals (a la carte items, adult meals, etc.) is expressly prohibited.

Access to Meals

- a) The District shall provide all students, at all grade levels, upon request, any reimbursable meal offered on any particular day, regardless of any balance owed on a student's meal account, unless the student's parent or guardian has specifically provided written permission to the District to withhold a meal.
 - i. Free meal benefit eligible students will be allowed to receive a free breakfast and lunch meal of their choice each day.
 - ii. Reduced meal benefit eligible students will generally receive a breakfast of their choice for \$.25 and lunch of their choice for \$.25 each day. If such students must charge a meal, the charge meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals available to all students, unless the student's parent or guardian has specifically provided written permission to the District to withhold a meal.
 - iii. Full pay students will generally pay for meals at the District's published paid meal rate each day. If such students must charge a meal, the charge meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals available to all students, unless the student's parent or guardian has specifically provided written permission to the District to withhold a meal.
 - iv. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid; at no time will any child be permitted to charge a la carte items or other "extras" (second lunch, additional milk or beverage, etc.)

Ongoing Staff Training

- a) Staff will be trained annually and throughout the year as needed regarding the District's Meal Charging and Prohibition Against Meal Shaming Plan.
- b) The School Lunch Manager shall access appropriate written documents, videos, and other training materials if offered by the Child Nutrition Unit of the New York State Education Department or state professional organizations..
- c) The School Lunch Manager shall make random observations of students at each school building to ensure compliance with the District's Plan at least twice per fiscal year
- d) Staff training will include ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.

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Parent Notification

Parents/guardians will be notified that a student's meal card or account balance is exhausted and has accrued unpaid meal charges within five days of the charge and then every week thereafter. The District shall not charge any interest or fees in connection with any meals charged, except the District may charge convenience fees associated with the use of the *MySchoolBucks* secure online payment system.

Procedures to Handle Unpaid Meal Charges

- a) Every two weeks, the Food Service staff will review account balances using the *MySchoolBucks* program to identify unpaid balances. Upon review, unpaid accounts totaling greater than \$20 will require the Food Service staff to send an e-mail notice to the parent or guardian.
- b) If two e-mail notices are not acknowledged by the parent or guardian, the unpaid balance will be referred to the School Lunch Manager. The School Lunch Manager will mail a letter home to the parent/guardian.
- c) If the account balance is not brought current within two weeks of the date of the first letter, a subsequent letter will be mailed home asking for the parent/guardian to bring the account current by the end of the next week or contact the office if they have had a change in financial condition and need to make special repayment arrangements.
- d) If no response is received the emails or letters, personal phone calls will be made to the parent/guardian in order to:
 - i. Ask how the District can help to rectify the matter
 - ii. Offer payment options
 - iii. Reinforce to them the free/reduced lunch eligibility possibilities and application process, and remind them that the application was included with the opening of school packets, with additional information is available on the District's website
- e) If a child is graduated senior, and amount owed is less than \$25.00, these accounts will be subsidized by the general fund account. If the amount is greater than \$25.00, two additional mailings will be made to the parents and/or guardians to attempt to remedy the situation. If not corrected, the general fund will subsidize the balance due for said graduated senior.
- f) Nothing in this section is intended to allow for the unlimited accrual of debt on school food service accounts.
- g) The District will reimburse the food service account for all outstanding meal charges by no later than June 30 of each school year. Funds used to reimburse the food service account will be taken from a non-federal source

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Parent Outreach

- a) Staff will communicate with parents/guardians with five or more unpaid meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals. Staff will make every attempt to determine if a student is directly certified to be eligible for free meals;
- b) Staff will make two documented attempts to reach out to parents/guardians to complete a meal application in addition to the application and instructions provided in the school enrollment packet.
- c) Staff will contact the parent/guardian to offer assistance with completion of a meal application, to determine if there are other issues within the household causing the student to have insufficient funds, and to offer any other assistance that is appropriate.

Minimizing Student Distress

- a) Staff will not publicly identify or stigmatize any student who cannot pay for a meal or who owes a meal debt by any means, or discuss any outstanding meal debt in the presence of any other students.
- b) Students with unpaid meal charges will not be identified in any way.
- c) Staff will not require that a student throw away a meal after it has been served because of the student's inability to pay for the meal or because of previous unpaid meal charges.
- d) Staff will not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid meal charges.
- e) Staff will deal directly with parents/guardians regarding unpaid meal charges, but will not use a debt collector, as defined in section eight hundred three of the federal consumer credit protection act (15 U.S.C. § 1692a).

Ongoing Eligibility Certification

- a) Staff will conduct direct certification through the New York Student Identification System (NYSSIS) or using SED Roster Upload at least monthly to maximize free eligibility.
- b) Staff will provide parents/guardians with free, printed application for free and reduced price meals and instructions at the beginning of each school year in the school enrollment packet.
- c) If the District uses an electronic meal application, it will provide an explanation of the process in the school enrollment packet and instructions on how to request a paper application at no cost.
- d) The District will provide at least two additional free and reduced price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.

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- a) The District will use its administrative prerogative to complete an application on a student's behalf judiciously, and only after using exhaustive efforts to obtain a completed application from the student's parent/guardian (pursuant to title seven, section 245.6(d) of the Code of Federal Regulations). The District will complete the application using only available information on family size and income that falls within approvable guidelines.
- b) The District will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, and runaway coordinators at least monthly to certify eligible students and make sure such students receive free school meals, in accordance with federal law.

Prepaid Accounts

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via www.myschoolbucks.com, with cash, or with a check payable to Churchville-Chili School Lunch (please write your child's full name and student ID number on the check). Further details are available on the District's webpage at www.cccsd.org. Funds should be maintained in accounts to minimize the possibility that a student may be without meal money on any given day. Any remaining funds for a particular student will be carried over to the next school year.

To obtain a refund for a withdrawn or graduating student, a written or e-mailed request for a refund of any money remaining in the student's account must be submitted. Students who are graduating at the end of the year will be given the option to transfer any remaining money to a sibling's account through a written request.

Unclaimed funds must be requested within one school year. Unclaimed funds will then become the property of the District Food Service Program.

Adopted: 6/26/2018

Revised: 11/23/2021