

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) Free meal benefit eligible students will be allowed to receive a free lunch meal of their choice each day. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.
- b) Reduced meal benefit eligible students will be allowed to receive a lunch of their choice for \$.25 each day. 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. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.
- c) Full pay students will pay for meals at the District's published paid meal rate each day. 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. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Ongoing Staff Training

- a) Staff will be trained annually and throughout the year as needed on the procedures for managing meal charges using the State Education Department (SED) Webinar or the District's training program.
- b) Staff training will include ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.

SUBJECT: MEAL CHARGING AND PROHIBITION AGAINST MEAL SHAMING (Cont'd.)**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 5 days of the charge and then every week thereafter.

Parent Outreach

- a) Staff will communicate with parents/guardians with three or more unpaid meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price 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 meal application to determine if there are other issues within the household causing the student to have insufficient funds, offering any other assistance that is appropriate.

Minimizing Student Distress

- a) Staff will not publicly identify or stigmatize any student in line for a meal or discuss any outstanding meal debt in the presence of any other students.
- b) Students with unpaid meal charges will not be required to wear a wristband or hand stamp, or to do chores or other work to pay for meals.
- c) Staff will not 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.

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 and reduced price application 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.

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- 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.
- e) 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. The District will complete the application using only available information on family size and income that falls within approvable guidelines.
- f) The District will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, and runaway coordinators at least monthly to certify eligible students.

Prepaid Accounts

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via <https://www.myschoolbucks.com> or with a check payable to North Merrick UFSD. Further details are available on the District's webpage at <https://www.nmerrickschools.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 may 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.

Unpaid Meal Charges and Debt Collection

Unpaid meal charges are a financial burden to the district and taxpayers and can negatively affect the school program. Unpaid meal charges shall be considered "delinquent" as per the district's accounting practices. The district shall make every attempt to recover unpaid meal charges before the end of the school year, but may continue efforts into the next school year. The district shall notify parents/guardians of unpaid meal charges at regular intervals, and may engage in collection activities. The district shall offer repayment plans, and may take other actions that do not result in harm or shame to the child, until unpaid charges are paid.

Abuse of policy

A student who has abused this policy can be refused a meal. Such a refusal is not considered to be a violation of any state or federal laws concerning school food programs. However before denying any student a meal, school food authorities (SFAs) shall carefully consider the negative consequences of such an action. Under no circumstance shall a student be refused a meal on the basis of an inability to pay. Refusing very young children or students with disabilities is prohibited by the Board.

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If SFAs suspect that a student may be abusing this policy, written notice will be provided to the parent that if he/she continues to abuse this policy, the privilege of charging meals will be refused.

The school district shall send a letter home to all parents on an annual basis prior to the opening day of school, outlining the requirements of this policy. The policy shall also be published in appropriate school and district publications.

Staff

Staff members are allowed to purchase food from the district's food services. However, all purchases must be on a cash basis. Staff members will not be allowed to charge meals to be repaid later.

Adoption Date