

**Regulation 5661R**

**Non-Instructional/Business Operations**

**MEAL SHAMING PROHIBITION PLAN**

**Goal**

The West Irondequoit Food Services Plan is designed to assure that no student whose parent/guardian has unpaid school meal fees will be denied a meal under any circumstances. In addition, the plan is designed to maintain the integrity and dignity of students and households and to avoid shame or harm to the student, as well as to establish effective approaches for communicating with parents and collecting outstanding balances in ways that do not stigmatize, distress, or embarrass anyone.

The Plan is intended to comply with all federal and state laws and regulations, as well as with State Education Department guidelines.

**Charging Meals**

Students who have forgotten or lost their money will always be permitted to charge a reimbursable meal regardless of the status of their lunch accounts. When a student needs to charge a meal, staff will have been trained to assure that the integrity and dignity of the student are protected. Accordingly, the following actions are prohibited:

- Announcing or publicizing the names of children with unpaid meal charges
- Discussing outstanding debt in the presence of other students
- Sending clearly marked notices home with children who have an outstanding balance
- Using hand stamps, wristbands, stickers, or other physical markers to identify children with outstanding meal charges
- Requiring students with unpaid meal charges to do chores or other work
- Throwing a student's meal in the trash
- Taking any action directed at the student to collect unpaid meal charges
- Serving alternate, non-reimbursable meals (i.e., cheese sandwich)
- Using a debt collector
- Any other actions that may embarrass or stigmatize a student, or compromise his/her dignity or integrity

**Staff Training**

Applicable food service and other staff will be trained annually and throughout the year as needed on the procedures for managing meal charges, for protecting the dignity and integrity of students, and for attempting to recover outstanding debts. Training may include use of the NYSED Webinar and/or the District's own training programs. Appropriate staff will also be trained in the criteria and procedures by which families may become certified as eligible for free and reduced-price meals.

### **Parent Notification and Outreach**

The District will work directly with parents/guardians to address issues regarding unpaid meal debt. The Assistant Superintendent for Finance will direct appropriate staff to communicate with parents regarding outstanding debt and related issues. In all transactions, every effort will be made to protect the dignity and integrity of parents as well as of students.

#### *Notification of Debt*

Parents/guardians will be notified when a student has charged five meals and will be encouraged to discharge their debt. Notifications will be repeated monthly until the debt is paid.

#### *Outreach Regarding Free and Reduced-Price Meals*

Where meal debt persists beyond four weeks, staff will reach out to parents to explore eligibility for and interest in the District's Free and Reduced-price Meals Program. Staff will offer assistance in understanding the program and, where indicated, in completing an application for the program.

Procedures will include a process to address charges when a student owes money for five or more meals wherein the District will:

1. Make every attempt to determine whether the student is directly certified to be eligible for free meals
2. Make at least two attempts (not including the application and instructions that are included in District's enrollment packet) to reach the student's parent or guardian to fill out a meal application
3. Contact the parent/guardian to:
  - a. Offer assistance with a meal application
  - b. Determine if there are other issues within the household that have caused the child to have insufficient funds to purchase a school meal
  - c. Offer any other assistance that is appropriate

### **Communication of the Plan**

The District will share details of its Food Service Program and its Meal Shaming Prohibition Plan with families through its website and through applicable mailings to parents. Content will include a description of the free and reduced-price meals program, eligibility criteria, and associated applications and procedures.

At the beginning of each school year for all families and upon enrollment in the District for new families, the District will provide an explanation of the procedures to enroll in the free and reduced priced lunch programs. The materials will include:

1. A printed free and reduced priced meal application in every school enrollment packet, or
2. An explanation of the electronic meal application process and instructions on how parents or guardians may request a paper application at no cost (if the District uses an electronic meal application process)

**District Applications for Free and Reduced Price Lunch Eligibility**

In accordance with 7 CFR 245.6(d), the District may complete and file an application for free or reduced priced meals for a student if the District determines that a student who has not submitted a meal application is eligible.

**Homeless Students**

The District will coordinate with coordinators for foster, homeless, migrant, and runaway students to certify eligibility for free school meals. The District's liaison for homeless, foster, and migrant students will coordinate with the Food Service Program to assure that such students receive free school meals in accordance with federal law.

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