# District Policy

## 8550 - MEAL CHARGES/OUTSTANDING FOOD SERVICE BILL (M)

Section: Operations
Date Created: October 2023
Date Edited: October 2023

**M**

The Board of Education shall establish a meal charge program to permit students in the district to charge for breakfast or lunch. Collection of any payment for a meal charge program account that is in arrears shall be addressed in accordance with provisions of this Policy.

The Board of Education recognizes a student may forget to bring breakfast or lunch (meal), as applicable, or money to purchase a meal to school on a school day. In this circumstance, the food service program will provide the student a meal and will inform the Principal or designee. The Principal or designee will contact the student's parent to provide notice of an outstanding meal bill and will provide the parent with a period of ten school days to pay the amount due. If the student's parent has not made full payment by the end of the ten school days, the Principal or designee shall again contact the parent with a second notice informing the parent of any action to be taken by the school district in response to a student's school breakfast or school lunch bill being in arrears. Such action may include denying the student school breakfast or lunch. A school district shall report at least biannually to the New Jersey Department of Agriculture the number of students who are denied school breakfast or school lunch in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21a. and this Policy.

The school district shall not:

1. Publicly identify or stigmatize a student who cannot pay for a meal or whose school meal bill is in arrears. (For example, by requiring the student to sit at a separate table or wear a wristband, hand stamp, or identifying mark or by serving the student an alternative meal);

2. Require a student who cannot pay for a school meal or whose school meal bill is in arrears to do chores or other work to pay for the school meal; or

3. Require a student to discard a school meal after it has been served because of the student's inability to pay for a school meal or because money is owed for previously provided meals.

If a student owes money for the equivalent of five or more school meals at any time during the school year, the Principal or designee shall:

1. Determine if the student is eligible for a free or reduced-price school meal;

2. Make at least two attempts, not including the application or instructions provided to the parent each school year pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21b.; to contact the student's parent and have the parent fill out an application for the school lunch program and school breakfast program; and

3. Contact the student's parent to offer assistance with the application for the school lunch and school breakfast program; determine if there are other issues within the household that have caused the child to have insufficient funds to purchase a school breakfast or school lunch; and offer any other appropriate assistance.

The school district shall direct communications about a student's school meal bill being in arrears to the parent and not the student. The school district's contact with the parent may be via email or telephone call. Nothing in N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21 shall prohibit the school district from sending a student home with a letter addressed to a parent.

If the student's meal bill is in arrears, but the student has the money to purchase a meal on a subsequent school day, the student will be provided a meal with payment and the food service program will not use the student's payment to repay previously unpaid charges if the student intended to use the money to purchase that school day's meal.

A parent who has received a second notice their child's meal bill is in arrears and who has not made payment in full within one week from the date of the second notice will be requested to meet with the Principal or designee to discuss and resolve the matter.

A parent's refusal to meet with the Principal or designee or take other steps to resolve the matter may be indicative of more serious issues in the family or household. However, when a parent's routine failure to provide breakfast or lunch is reasonably suspected to be indicative of child abuse or neglect, the Principal or designee shall immediately report such suspicion to the Department of Children and Families, Division of Child Protection and Permanency as required in N.J.S.A. 9:6-8.10. Such reporting shall not be delayed to accommodate a parent's meeting with the Principal or designee.

Students receiving free meals will not be denied a meal even if they accrued a negative balance from other purchases in the cafeteria.

In accordance with N.J.S.A 18A:33-21b., at the beginning of each school year, and upon initial enrollment in the case of a student enrolling during the school year, the school district shall provide to the parent of each student:

1. Information on the National School Lunch Program and the Federal School Breakfast Program;

2. An application to apply for the school lunch and school breakfast programs and instructions for completing the application; and

3. Information on the rights of students and their families under N.J.S.A. 18A:22-21 et seq.

The school district may provide the application and information electronically through the means by which the school district communicates with parents electronically. The application and information shall be in a language the parent understands.

The school district's liaison for the education of homeless children shall coordinate with school district personnel to ensure that a homeless student receives free school meals and is monitored according to the school district policies pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21c.

The school district may post this Policy on the school district's website provided there is a method in place to ensure this Policy reaches all households without access to a computer or the Internet.

N.J.S.A. 18A:33-21; 18A:33-21a.; 18A:33-21b.; 18A:33-21c.

Adopted: 26 October 2023