

**SUBJECT: MEAL CHARGING AND PROHIBITION AGAINST MEAL SHAMING**

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

Unpaid charges place a large financial burden on the District and the meal program. The purpose of this plan 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 no student is 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 plan pertain to regular priced reimbursable school breakfast and lunch 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 breakfast and lunch meal of their choice each day. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid and cannot be charged.
- b) Reduced meal benefit eligible students will be allowed to receive a breakfast of their choice for \$0.25 and lunch of their choice for \$0.25 each day. The charge meals offered to students will be a reimbursable meal of the student's choice, available that day 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 and cannot be charged.
- 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 a reimbursable meal of the student's choice, available that day 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 and cannot be charged.

**Ongoing Staff Training**

- a) All food service department staff will be trained annually and throughout the year as needed on the procedures for managing meal charges using the NYSED Webinar or the District's training program.
- b) Food service staff training includes 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 account balance is exhausted and has accrued meal charges within 2 weeks of the first overage charge via automated phone call and then at least every 2 weeks thereafter. Parents of Kindergarten through third grade students may also receive a slip in a sealed envelope, sent home via the student's go home folder (envelope will not be presented to student in line or in the cafeteria).

**Parent Outreach**

- a) Food service staff will communicate with parents/guardians with \$15 or more in meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals.
- b) Food service staff will make two documented attempts to reach out to parents/guardians through the automated phone messaging system to complete a meal application in addition to the application and instructions being mailed to all families each summer and included in the District registrar's enrollment paperwork provided to new students. Automated messages will include information on the free and reduced price program and instructions on how to obtain an application.
- c) Food service staff will contact the parent/guardian, if needed, to offer assistance with completion of meal application to determine if there are other circumstances within the household causing the child to have insufficient funds and offering any other assistance that is appropriate. District staff may also touch base with the school counselor, social worker, and/or building administration to determine if there may be circumstances that may cause the family to need assistance.
- d) Parent/guardian and food service department representative may mutually agree upon a repayment schedule, but will not charge any interest or fees related to charged balances.

**Minimizing Student Distress**

- a) District staff will not publicly identify or stigmatize any student on the line or discuss any outstanding meal debt in the presence of any other students.
- b) Students who incur meal charges will not be required to wear a wristband or handstamp, or to do chores or other work to pay for meals.

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- c) District 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 meal charges. Alternative meals will not be required or served.
- d) District staff will not take any action directed at a pupil to collect unpaid meal fees.
- e) District staff will deal directly with parents/guardians regarding unpaid meal fees.

**Ongoing Eligibility Certification**

- a) District staff will conduct direct certification with NYSSIS or using NYSED Roster Upload to maximize free eligibility at least monthly to maximize free eligibility.
- b) District staff will provide parents/guardians with a free and reduced price application and instructions prior to the beginning of each school year. This will be provided through a mailing to all families each summer. Students that register throughout the year will be provided with the application and instructions in the District registrar's enrollment paperwork.
- c) If the District uses an electronic meal application, it will provide an explanation of the process in the District enrollment packet and instructions on how to request a paper application at no cost.
- d) The District will make attempts to reach out to parents/guardians through the automated phone messaging system to complete a meal application. The message will include information on the free and reduced price program and instructions on how to obtain an application. District staff will provide additional free and reduced price applications upon request to families identified as owing meal charges.
- e) The District will use its administrative prerogative judiciously, only after using exhaustive efforts to obtain a completed application from the parent/guardian only with available information on family size and income that falls within approvable guidelines.
- f) The District will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, runaway coordinators to certify eligible students. District liaisons required for homeless, foster, and migrant students shall coordinate with the food service department to 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 the food service department page of the District's website or with a check payable to Lancaster Central School District. Checks may be submitted to the cafeteria cashiers in the buildings, building main offices, and to the program's office located at 177 Central Avenue.

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Further details on meal payments are available on the District's website. Funds should be maintained in accounts to minimize the possibility that a child may be without meal money on any given day. Any remaining funds for a particular student may/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 their 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's Food Service Program.

Education Law § 908

Adopted: 10-1-18