

CHARGING SCHOOL MEALS AND PROHIBITION AGAINST SHAMING

The Board of Education recognizes that on occasion, students may not have enough funds for a meal. To ensure that students do not go hungry, the Board will allow students who do not have enough funds to “charge” the cost of reimbursable meals to be paid back at a later date subject to the terms in this policy. Extra items such as à la carte items and snacks may not be charged.

Charged meals must be counted and claimed for reimbursement on the day that the student charged (received) the meal, not the day that the charge is paid back. When charges are paid, the monies are not to be considered “à la carte” transactions, as a section on the daily cash report or deposit summary reads “charges paid.”

Parents/guardians will be notified that a student’s account balance is exhausted and has accrued meal charges within five days of a charge, and regularly thereafter until the account is replenished. When a student’s account reflects three outstanding meal charges, the District’s Food Service Department will notify (or attempt to notify) the parents/guardians of the outstanding balance, the process to refill the account, and the District’s policy on charging school meals. When a student’s account reflects five outstanding meal charges, a building administrator or designee will contact the parents/guardians. Notification may continue regularly until the account is replenished. Parents/guardians must repay all unpaid charges remaining at the end of the year or before their child leaves the District, whichever occurs first.

Students shall not be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a negative balance from other cafeteria purchases, unless the parent/guardian has provided written permission to the school to withhold a meal. No student with unpaid charges will be prohibited from purchasing food if they have money on a particular day.

Students who cannot pay for a meal or who have unpaid meal debt shall not be publicly identified or stigmatized (including wristbands or hand stamps), required to do chores or work to pay for meals, or have meals thrown away after they have been served. District staff shall not discuss a student’s unpaid meal debt in front of other students. The District shall not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid school meal fees. However, District personnel may discreetly notify students of their account balances, and that certain items (e.g., à la carte, etc.) cannot be provided with charged meals.

The District shall discreetly notify parents/guardians of students with negative balances of at least five meals, determine if the student is directly certified to be eligible for free meals, and attempt to reach the parent/guardian to assist them in the application process for free and/or reduced price meals, and determine if there are other issues within the household causing the insufficient funds and offer appropriate assistance. If a parent/guardian regularly fails to provide meal money and does not qualify for free or reduced price meals, the District may take other actions as appropriate, including notifying the local department of social services if neglect is suspected.

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If a student is suspected of abusing this policy, written notice will be provided to the parent/guardian.

The District will notify all parents/guardians of this policy in writing on an annual basis at the start of the school year and when families transfer during the year. The policy shall also be published in appropriate school and District publications. All staff involved in implementing and enforcing this policy shall also be notified of these requirements and their responsibilities. The District's enrollment process shall include the application process for free and reduced price meals. If the District becomes aware that a student is so eligible, it shall file an application for the student. Staff responsible for assisting foster, homeless and migrant students shall coordinate with the food services staff to ensure such students receive free school meals.

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 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 District staff may engage in collection activities. The District may not charge fees or interest and 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.

Account Balances

Remaining funds will be carried over to the next school year. When students leave the District or graduate, a written request from a student's parent/guardian for a refund of any remaining funds may be submitted. Parents/guardians may request that funds be transferred to other students (e.g., siblings, unpaid accounts). All transfer requests must be in writing. Unclaimed funds remaining after one school year shall be absorbed by the school meal account.

Staff

Staff members are allowed to purchase food from the District's food services. However, all purchases must be paid for at the point of sale. Staff members are not allowed to charge meals to be repaid later.

All District personnel with responsibilities under this policy will be trained in the provisions of this policy and the requirements of Education Law Section 908 on an annual basis.

Cross-ref: 8520, Free and Reduced Price Food Services

Ref: 42 USC § 1779 (Child Nutrition Act of 1966)
42 USC § 1758(f)(1); § 1766(a) (National School Lunch Act)

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2 CFR § 200.426 (accounting for debt in federal programs)

7 CFR §§ 210.9 210.12; 210.19; 220.13; 245.5 (accounting in federal school meal programs)

Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (Public Law 111-296), § 143

N.Y. Education Law § 908

USDA Report to Congress, *Review of Local Policies on Meal Charges and Provision of Alternate Meals*, June 2016, www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/unpaidmealcharges-report.pdf

Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies, USDA FNS Memo SP 46-2016 (07/08/16), www.fns.usda.gov/unpaid-meal-charges-local-meal-charge-policies

Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A, USDA FNS Memo SP 57-2016 (09/16/16), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP57-2016os.pdf>

Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A, USDA FNS Memo SP 23-2017 (03/23/17), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP23-2017os.pdf>

Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments, USDA FNS Memo SP 47-2016 (07/08/16), www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP47-2016os.pdf

Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge - Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools, USDA FNS Guidance Document (May 2017), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP29-2017a1.pdf>

Student Meal Charge Policy, NYSED Guidance Memo, (5/30/17), <http://www.cn.nysed.gov/content/student-meal-charge-policy>

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