

Meal Charge and Prohibition against Meal Shaming
(Formally Titled Meal Charge)

8505

I. Purpose

The Board of Education is committed to providing the opportunity for all students to access nutritious no-or low-cost meals in a cost-effective manner. In recognition of the fact that students may occasionally forget lunch money, this policy sets forth the procedures to ensure that a pupil whose parent/guardian has unpaid school meal fees is not shamed or treated differently than a pupil whose parent/guardian does not have unpaid meal fees.

It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to ensure that money for lunch is either brought to school to pay for lunch or that money is deposited to the students individual meal account regularly, maintaining a positive balance to cover the cost of student purchases.

Unpaid charges place a large financial burden on our school. The purpose of this policy is to insure 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 Smithtown Central School District in a way that does not stigmatize distress or embarrass students. The provisions of this policy pertain to regular priced reimbursable school breakfast and lunch only. The Smithtown Central School District provides this policy as a courtesy to students in the event that they forget or lose their money. Charging of items outside of the reimbursable meal (a la carte items, adult meals, etc.) is expressly prohibited. Meal charges should be paid back the next day.

II. Policy

Free Meal Benefit - Free 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.

Reduced Meal Benefit - Reduced eligible students will be allowed to receive a breakfast of their choice for \$.25 and 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 school to withhold a meal. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Full Pay Students - Students will pay for meals at the school'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 school to withhold a meal. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

A computer generated point of sale system will be used to identify and record all meals as well as collect repayments. Charged meals must be counted and claimed for reimbursement on the day that the student charged (received) the meal, not the day the charge is paid back. When charges are paid, these monies are not to be considered "a la carte" transactions as a section on the daily payment report reads, "repayment".

Staff - Staff members are allowed to purchase food from the district's Food Services. However, all purchases must be on a cash basis or have funds on their account. As per the State Education Department, staff members are not permitted to charge meals to be repaid at a later date.

Notification to parents of the districts' meal policy will be available annually, via our website. The website address is www.smithtown.k12.ny.us. Go to Departments and then Child Nutrition to see the policy.

ONGOING STAFF TRAINING:

- ❖ Staff will be trained annually and throughout the year as needed on the procedures for managing meal charges using the NYSED Webinar or the school's training program.
- ❖ Staff training includes ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.

PARENT NOTIFICATION:

- ❖ Parents/guardians will be notified that a student's account balance is exhausted within three (3) days and then every week, thereafter, by automated telephone, email or regular mail.
- ❖ Parents/guardians will be notified that a student has accrued meal charges within three (3) days of the charge and then every week thereafter.

- ❖ Students will be required to pay all meal charges before being allowed to purchase a la carte items (snacks).
- ❖ If the district suspects 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.

PARENT OUTREACH:

- ❖ Staff will communicate with parents/guardians with three (3) or more meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals.
- ❖ School 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.
- ❖ School 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 child to have insufficient funds, offering any other assistance that is appropriate.

MINIMIZING STUDENT DISTRESS:

- ❖ School will not publicly identify or stigmatize any student on the line or discuss any outstanding meal debt in the presence of any other students.
- ❖ Students who incur meal charges will not be required to wear a wristband or hand stamp, or to do chores or work to pay for meals.
- ❖ Schools 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.
- ❖ Schools will not take any action directed at a pupil to collect unpaid school meal fees.
- ❖ Schools will deal directly with parents/guardians regarding unpaid school meal fees.

ONGOING ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION:

- ❖ School staff will conduct direct certification with NYSSIS or using NYSED Roster upload at least monthly to maximize free eligibility.
- ❖ School staff will provide parents/guardians with free and reduced price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year in school enrollment packet.
- ❖ Schools will provide at least two additional free and reduced price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.
- ❖ Schools will use 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.
- ❖ Schools will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, runaway coordinators at least monthly to certify eligible students.

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via MySchoolBucks.com or with cash or a check payable to Child Nutrition Program. A low balance alert can be set up for your child's account at MySchoolBucks.com. Further details are available on our webpage at Smithtown.k12.ny.us →Departments→Child Nutrition. 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.

Parents will receive a letter at the end of the school year stating any negative balance their child may have. The charge is expected to be paid before the school year ends. Outstanding student charges resulting from nonpayment of school meals is not an allowable cost to the nonprofit school food service account and cannot be absorbed by the School Nutrition Program at the end of the school year or carried forward to the next school year. If student charges are not paid the school must subsidize the nonprofit school food service account for all unpaid meals by June 30th of each year. The subsidy must be from the general or other non-federal source.

Refunds for withdrawn, and graduating students; 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 to a sibling's account with a written request.

Unclaimed Funds must be requested within one school year. Unclaimed funds will then become the property of the Child Nutrition Program.

REF:

42 USC § 1779 (Child Nutrition Act of 1966)

42 USC §§ 1758 (f) (I); 1766 (a) (National School Lunch Act)

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Revised: