

Meal Charge and Prohibition Against Meal Shaming Policy Policy 8505

The **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** participates in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program to receive commodities and subsidies from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In return, the **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** provides free and reduced-price meals to elementary and secondary students in its schools and serves meals that meet federal requirements.

The Superintendent or designee will carry out the rules of the School Lunch and Breakfast Programs. The **Tuckahoe Union Free School District's** Reviewing Official and Verification Official or the Department of Social Services Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (ODTA) will determine student eligibility. Appeals regarding eligibility should be submitted to the **Tuckahoe Union Free School District's** Hearing Official.

The **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** may allow free or reduced-priced meals for qualifying **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** students after receiving a written application from the students' parent or guardian or a "direct certification letter" from the (ODTA). Applications will be provided by the **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** to all families.

School officials must also determine eligibility for free or reduced-price meals by using the Direct Certification Matching process. Any student residing in a household receiving federal assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), or Medicaid is automatically eligible for free meals (and milk); eligible families will not have to complete further applications. The District will notify parents or guardians of eligibility, giving them the opportunity to decline free meals (and milk).

Child Nutrition Program Authorization

Since the **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** participates in one or more Child Nutrition Program, the Superintendent has developed rules which address:

- What can be charged;
- The system used for identifying and recording charged meals;
- The system used for collection of repayments; and
- Ongoing communication of this policy to parents and students. The **Tuckahoe Union Free School District's** meal-charge policy and procedures will be distributed to all households that transfer into the **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** during the school year. The policy and procedures may vary by grade. **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** will also provide details regarding payment methods on its website.

I. Purpose – Charging Meals

The goal of the **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** is 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 school 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 our district. The purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with federal requirements for the USDA Child Nutrition Program and, 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 **Tuckahoe Union Free 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, lunch and snack (if applicable in the future) meals only. The **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** provides this policy as a courtesy to those students if they forget or lose their money. Charging of items outside of the reimbursable meals (a la carte items, adult meals, snacks, ice cream, etc.) is expressly prohibited.

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 breakfast of their choice for \$.25 and lunch of their choice for \$.25 each day. The charged meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals that are available to all students, unless the student's parent/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 breakfast and lunch meals at the school's published paid meal rates each day. The charged meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals that are available to all students, unless the student's parent/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.

The **Tuckahoe Union Free School District's** point-of-sale system will track all charges and payments.

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 training programs provided by the **Tuckahoe Union Free School District**. Staff training includes ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.

PARENT NOTIFICATION:

Unpaid meal charges will be addressed directly with the student's parent or guardian who is responsible for providing funds for meal purchases; discreet notifications of low, exhausted, or deficit balances will be sent at appropriate intervals during the school year. The notification may

include a repayment schedule, but will not charge any interest or fees related to meals charged prior to being paid. **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** administration will further consider the benefits of attempted collections and the costs that would be expended in collection attempts. Parents/guardians will be notified within 30 days that a student's meal card or account balance is exhausted and has accrued meal charges. Thereafter, parents/guardians will be notified at regular intervals.

PARENT OUTREACH:

Staff will communicate with parents/guardians with five 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 aid 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 and Food Service Management Company (FSMC) staff will not publicly identify or stigmatize any student on the serving line or discuss any outstanding meal debt in the presence of any other students.

Students who incur meal charges will not be overtly identified, will not be required to wear or carry any item that would identify unpaid meals, nor 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 quarterly 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.

Should the **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** begin using electronic meal applications, the district will provide an explanation of the process in the school enrollment packet and instructions on how to request a paper application at no cost.

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 www.myschoolmeals.com or with a check payable to **Tuckahoe Union Free School District**. Further details are available on our webpage at [www. TuckahoeSchools.org](http://www.TuckahoeSchools.org) 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 student will be carried over to the next school year.

Refunds for withdrawn and graduating students require submission of a written or e-mailed request for a refund of any money remaining in their account. 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 **Tuckahoe Union Free School District** Food Service Program.