

CHARGING SCHOOL MEALS

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 meals to be paid back at a later date subject to the terms of this policy. This policy applies to all paying students whether they are paying full-price or reduced-price.

To comply with NYSED guidelines and maintain a system of accounting for charged meals, regarding both full and reduced-price meals the Board shall:

- Allow only regular reimbursable meals to be charged, excluding extras, à la carte items, side dishes, additional meals, and snacks (competitive foods); and
- Use computer-generated point of sale system for identifying and recording all charged meals, as well as for collecting 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 “à la carte” transactions, as a section on the daily case report or deposit summary reads “charges paid.”

Student 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 that day.

If school food authorities suspect that a student may be abusing this policy, written notice will be provided to the parent/guardian. The district’s payment system allows for automatic replenishment when a balance reaches a certain limit. The district shall encourage parents/guardians to utilize this options.

Parents/guardians shall be discretely notified of student account balances regularly. When a student’s account balance falls to \$10.00 and whenever a meal is charged, the district will discretely notify the parent/guardian of the balance and the process to refill the account. This notification will continue regularly until the account is replenished. Parents/guardians must repay all unpaid charges remaining at the end of the school year or before their child leaves the district, whichever occurs first.

The district shall discretely notify parents/guardians of student 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 the parent/guardian regularly fails to provide meal money and does not qualify for free or reduced meals the district may take other actions appropriate, including notifying the local department of social services if neglect is suspected.

The school district shall notify all parents/guardians in writing on an annual basis, at the start of the school year and to families transferring during the year outlining the requirements of this policy. 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 responsibilities. The district’s enrollment policy shall include the application process for free and reduced meal. 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 food services staff to ensure such students received free school meals.

Unpaid meal charges are a financial burden to the district and the 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 may engage in collection activities by district staff, which do not involve debt collectors as defined in federal law (15 USC §1692a), and may not charge fees or interest. The district 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.

Remaining funds may be carried over to the next school year. When student leave the district or graduate, the district will attempt to contact the parent/guardian to return remaining funds. 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 three months shall be absorbed by the school meal account.

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.

Building principals, working with the head of food services, shall ensure that all district and food service staff with responsibilities under this policy will be trained on the provisions of this policy and the requirements of Education Law section 908.

Ref: 42 USC §1779 (Child Nutrition Act of 1966)
42 USC §§1758(f)(1); 1766(a) (National School Lunch Act)
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
15 USC §1692a (debt collector defined)
Education Law §908
USDA Report to Congress, Review of Local Policies on Meal Charges and Provision of Alternate Meals, June 2016
Unpaid Meal Charges: Local Meal Charge Policies, USDA FNS Memo SP 46-2016 (07/08/16)
Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A, USDA FNS Memo SP 57-2016 (09/16/16),
Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A, USDA FNS Memo SP 23-2017 (03/23/17),
Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments, USDA FNS Memo SP 47-2016 (07/08/16),
Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge - Proven Strategies from Our Nation’s Schools, USDA FNS Guidance Document (May 2017)
New York State Legislation - Prohibition Against Meal Shaming, NYSED Memo (5/1/18),
Meal Charge Plan Template, NYSED (5/1/18)

Adoption date: November 10, 2009
Reviewed: October 23, 2012
Revised: June 19, 2018