

Nyack UFSD plan to implement Prohibition Against Meal Shaming

The goal of the Nyack School District (the "District") is to provide student access to nutritious free or low-cost meals each school day and to ensure that a student whose parent or guardian has unpaid school meal fees is not shamed or treated differently than a student whose parent or guardian does not have unpaid meal fees.

The Board of Education recognizes and supports the understanding that students must feel free of the distress and embarrassment associated with not having adequate funds to pay for a school meal or having school meal debt. To ensure that such students are able to obtain nourishing and appropriate meals, and are not treated differently from other students, the District will implement a plan which addresses the needs of the students separately from the parent/guardian's financial responsibility for meal fees.

The intent of the District's plan is to define procedures and guidelines for District and Food Service Authority (FSA) staff to provide students with regular reimbursable meals (breakfast and lunch) in a manner which does not embarrass students who are unable to pay for them, and to do this in a manner which is consistent with regulatory requirements. In order to ensure District staff know and understand their responsibilities, training will be provided, to include the District Policy and Plan, as well as position specific procedures as appropriate.

Meals

The District recognizes the importance of good nutrition and the opportunity to provide nourishing meals to all students. Regular reimbursable breakfast and lunch meals, as well as snack and a-la-carte items are available, and will be provided as follows.

- **The District will provide a regular reimbursable meal of choice to any student upon request, regardless of the student's ability to pay or meal account balance.**
- **The District does not permit charging of snack or a-la-carte items. Such items must be paid in cash or pre-paid using a meal account.**
- **Parents/guardians may provide the District with a written request to prohibit charging to their school meal account(s) and the system will be updated to reflect this request.**

Meal Policy and Program Notification and Enrollment

At the beginning of the school year, the District will notify all District families of the requirements of the Meal Program and District policy, and their opportunity to apply for free and reduced meals. Such notification will also be provided to families upon transfer to the District during the course of the school year, and will be published on the District website and annual School Calendar.

To encourage families to complete the applications, District staff will

- Provide the free and reduced price application and assistance to complete it at no cost to the applicant
- Include the free and reduced price application in the school enrollment process
- Provide the free and reduced price application in both district publications and on the District website.
- Provide the application in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole languages
- Offer assistance in English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole languages
- Provide a 30 day carryover of eligibility from the prior school year
- Remind families about the 30 day re-application grace period at the beginning of each school year
- If the District becomes aware that a student is so eligible, administrative prerogative permits it to file an application for the student
- Staff responsible for assisting foster, homeless and migrant students shall coordinate with the food service staff to ensure such students immediately receive free school meals.
- Provide 30 days (or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever comes first) free eligibility to students transferring from a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2 (P2) participating school to a non-participating school

District Staff will make additional free and reduced price lunch program enrollment efforts as follows, if a student's unpaid meal balance reaches 5 meals:

- Make every effort to determine if the student is directly certified and eligible for free meals
- Notify the parent/guardian, at least twice, of the unpaid balance, and encourage program application
- Contact the parent/guardian directly, to offer assistance in the application process and to determine if there are other factors contributing to why the student does not have sufficient food/funds to purchase a meal, and offer other assistance as appropriate

To most effectively ensure that all eligible students are identified as eligible for free or reduced price meals, District staff will:

- Access Direct Certification Matching Process (DCMP) data, and consider the effective date of program eligibility as the date of the automated data matching file first identifying the student as eligible.
- Instruct parents that they don't have to complete an application if they are or are eligible for direct certification
- Follow procedures to coordinate with school liaisons to ensure that all migrant, foster, homeless and runaway children are immediately certified
- In extraordinary circumstances, complete an application on behalf of a child given sufficient cause and backup documentation supporting (7 CFR Part 245.6 (d) – administrative prerogative).

Meal Charge Guidelines

The following are the procedures to comply with State guidelines to permit the charging of meals and maintain a system to account for charged meals:

- Only regular meals may be charged, meaning what is on the menu, excluding extras such as a la carte items and snacks (which are considered “competitive foods”).
- To protect the confidentiality of all students, deter students from charging their lunch under another student’s ID and to maintain the point of sale system, students are required to input their student identification number when purchasing or charging meals.
- 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 cash purchases of food.
- Students who cannot pay for a meal or who have unpaid meal debt shall not be publicly identified, stigmatized, or treated differently from other students who pay or prepay for meals.
- The District allows only cash or pre-paid purchases of snack and a-la-carte items, and District staff are permitted to explain that these items cannot be provided with charged meals

Prohibitions

To ensure that all students, regardless of ability to pay for school meals, are treated equally, District staff are prohibited from the following discriminatory actions:

- Announcing or publicizing the names of students with unpaid meal charges
- Sending clearly marked notices home with children whose parent/guardian has an outstanding meal account balance
- Using hand stamps, wristbands, stickers, or other physical markers to identify students with outstanding meal charges
- Requiring students with outstanding meal charges to do chores or other work
- Throwing a student’s meal in the trash
- Taking any action directed at the student to collect unpaid meal charges
- Discussing any outstanding meal debt in the presence of other students
- Serving alternate meals
- Using a debt collector

Accounting and Unpaid Meal Charges

Unpaid and unreimbursed meal charges are a financial burden for the District, and compliance with federal requirements and the Child Nutrition program does not preclude financial accountability. The following procedures account for meal charges and address the collection of unpaid balances:

- District staff shall not discuss a student's unpaid account balance with the student or in front of other students.
- The district shall not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid school meal fees.
- The District will use a computer-generated point of sale system, which identifies and records all meals, both whether paid, free, reduced, or charged. The accounting for charged meals, as well as the repayment of charges, will be maintained on this system.
- Charged meals will 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 recorded as "a la carte" transactions; the transactions will be posted against charges.
- The first parental notification advising parents of unpaid balances will be by system generated letters from the point of sale system. The notice will include the date(s) and amount(s) of their child's charges and total amount owed.
- The food service office will report all unpaid school lunch charges to the building principal on a weekly basis. The principal will utilize the appropriate school staff, while maintaining confidentiality, to discreetly contact parents in an effort to resolve unpaid balances.
 - Information regarding the free and reduced meal program will be offered as well as assistance with the application process.
 - When a student's account balance falls to an annually predetermined limit, the principal will notify the parent/guardian of the balance and the process to refill the account. This notification will continue regularly until the account is replenished. Parent/guardians must repay all unpaid charges remaining at the end of the year or before their child leaves the district, whichever occurs first.
 - If the student carries a negative balance of at least 5 meals, the District will determine if the student is directly certified to be eligible for free meals. The Principal will 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 prices meals, the district may take other actions as appropriate, including notifying the local department of social services if neglect is suspected.
- The District's Business Office will be provided with a monthly listing of all outstanding meal charge balances by school.
- Each September, Building Principals will receive a confidential listing of the students attending their school who were eligible for the free/reduced program the previous year so they can offer assistance to the family before the 30 day grace period expires, at which time students are disqualified if a new application has not been submitted and approved.

Debt Collection

- 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 Account Balances

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

Staff Meals

- Staff members are allowed to purchase food from the District’s food services at the adult meal prices that are established in accordance with Child Nutrition Program regulations. All purchases must be on a cash basis. Staff members will not be allowed to charge meals to be repaid later.

Training

The District training program includes modules for staff members as appropriate, with assessment components to help ensure understanding:

- Staff will be trained annually and throughout the year as needed on the procedures for managing meal charges using the NYSED Webinar(s) and guidance materials and/or the school’s training program, which includes (<https://site.gcntraining.com/t02411/national-school-lunch-program>).
- Staff training includes ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.