

## STUDENT FOOD SERVICE ACCOUNTS

### I. Purpose

The goal of the Carmel Central 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 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 Carmel 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, lunch and snack meals only. The Carmel Central School District provides this policy as a courtesy to those students in the event that they forget or lose their money. Charging of items outside of the reimbursable meals (a la carte items, adult meals, 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 a breakfast of their choice for \$.25 and lunch of their choice for \$.25 each day. A student will be allowed to charge a maximum of three meals to their account after the balance reaches zero. 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. A student will be allowed to charge a maximum of three meals to their account after the balance reaches zero. 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.

#### 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:

- At the beginning of each school year, the District will send home an income application to all families to determine eligibility for free and reduced lunch. For students who exhaust their account balances and whose families have not completed an income application, the District will make at least two attempts during the school year to remind such families about the District's free and reduced lunch programs and to encourage them to complete an income application for same.
- Families who have not completed the income application and who have children who have exhausted their balances will be contacted by the District to offer assistance regarding how to complete the income application and to determine if there are other factors contributing to why the student does not have sufficient food or funds to purchase a meal and offer other assistance as appropriate.
- Parents/guardians will be notified through weekly emails that a student's account balance is exhausted within three days and then every week thereafter. Families that do not have a valid email address will receive phone calls or letters as needed.
- Parents/guardians will be notified through weekly emails that a student has accrued meal charges within three days of the charge and then every day thereafter. Families that do not have a valid email address will receive phone calls or letters on a weekly basis.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged to register for a free account with our online payment service, MySchoolBucks, regardless of how they pay for school meals. Parents/guardians can set up low balance email alerts and view cafeteria account activity for their students. Parents may also choose to make a payment online using a credit or debit card at any time and schedule recurring payments. A program fee will apply if using a credit/debit card.
- In the event that a student's account balance has been exhausted, the student's parent will be sent a notice from the school advising the parent of the balance and offering the option of a reasonable repayment schedule to pay down the balance due. The District will not charge any interest or fees in connection with any balance owed for meals.
- When a student owes money for five or more meals, parents will be sent a notice via email or regular mail if there is no valid email address for the parent, explaining the District's free and reduced meal programs and eligibility for same. The notification will explain that the District will make every effort to work with the family to determine their child's eligibility for free meals, including sending the parent an income application to help determine eligibility for free and reduced lunch programs.
- In extenuating circumstances, the District may complete an income application on behalf of a child given sufficient cause and backup documentation supporting the child's eligibility.

- The District will coordinate with the District's Homeless Liaison to ensure that all migrant, foster, homeless and runaway children are immediately certified for free meals.
- The District will access the Statewide Direct Certification DCMP data at least monthly to help ensure that all eligible students are identified as eligible for free or reduced meals.

#### 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 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.
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#### MINIMIZING STUDENT DISTRESS:

- Schools 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 handstamp, or to do chores or work to pay for meals.
- Schools will not throw away a student's 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.
- Schools will not require the student to eat an alternate meal such as a cheese sandwich if the child does not have the money to pay for a meal or has an unpaid balance on their account.
- The District will not use a debt collector to collect unpaid meal fees owed to the District.

#### 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, as soon as the current school year application is published by New York State. Families can access the current school year application on the school district's website, at each school's main office, in the school district's calendar, or by calling the Food Service Department.
- 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 at [www.MySchoolBucks.com](http://www.MySchoolBucks.com) or with a check payable to CCD Cafeteria Account. Further details are available on our webpage at <http://www.carmelschools.org/Departments/Food Services/MySchoolBucks>. 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.

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 Carmel Central School District Food Service Program.