

Meal Charge and Prohibition Against Meal Shaming Policy Template

I. Purpose

The goal of the Mechanicville CSD 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, 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 Mechanicville CSD 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 Mechanicville CSD 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. The charged meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals available to all students, unless the student's parent or guardian has specifically provided written direction 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 direction to the school to withhold a meal. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

The District's Food Service Department is responsible for maintaining charge records and notifying the building administrator of each school in the District of any outstanding balances for students. The building administrator of each school or is responsible for reviewing the outstanding balances for students in his/her building at least once a month. Upon review, the building administrator is responsible for contacting parents/ guardians for students with outstanding balances in excess of \$10.00. The District reserves the right to take all actions legally available to it to collect from parents the outstanding amounts owed to it for unpaid balances. Outstanding Balances under the \$10.00 threshold will be followed up internally by the building administrator subject to the provisions of this 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 meal card or account balance is exhausted within 2 days and then every 2 days/weeks thereafter.
- Parents/guardians will be notified that a student has accrued meal charges within 2 days of the charge and then every 2 days/weeks thereafter.

PARENT OUTREACH:

- Principal and/ or the School Lunch Manager will communicate with parents/guardians with five or more meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals.
- The School Lunch Manager and Principal 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.
- Schools using electronic meal application 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. The School Lunch Manager will e-mail parents a notification of charges and will attach a free and reduced lunch application. They will BCC themselves and keep the copy in an appropriately marked e-mail folder for review purposes.
- Schools will use administrative prerogative judiciously: In certain circumstances when households fail to apply for free or reduced priced meals, the nutritional needs of students who are obviously at an extreme economic disadvantage may be addressed by local officials , 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 a check payable to Mechanicville School lunch fund. . Further details are available on our webpage at mechanicville.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 particular student may/will be carried over to the next school year.

Refunds for withdrawal : A signed letter or e-mailed request from the account on the student's record for a refund of any money remaining in a student's account must be submitted by the parent or guardian of the student five business days before the refund will be made. All refunds will be in the form of a check to the parent/guardian of the account of the named student. Students who are graduating at the end of the year will be given the option to transfer funds to a sibling's account with a written request.

Unclaimed Funds must be requested within two school years. Unclaimed funds will be held in the District's Trust and Agency Fund. After Two school years the unclaimed funds will go to the district's Trust and Agency/ School Lunch Subsidy Account.