

CHARGING SCHOOL MEALS AND PROHIBITION AGAINST MEAL SHAMING

The goal of the Three Village CSD Child Nutrition Program is to provide student access to nutritious no- or low-cost meals each school day. 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, but also to promote responsible student behavior and minimize the fiscal burden to the District 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. In addition to procedures for allowing meal “charges” the intent of this policy is to establish procedures to address unpaid meal charges throughout the district in a way that does not stigmatize, distress or embarrass students and aims to safeguard the pupil whose parent/guardian has unpaid school meal fees so the student is not shamed or treated differently than a pupil whose parent/guardian does not have unpaid meal fees.

Unpaid charges are a financial burden to the District and taxpayers and can negatively affect the school program. The purpose of this policy is to insure compliance with federal and state requirements for the USDA Child Nutrition Program and, to provide oversight and accountability for the collection of outstanding student meal balances. 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.

To Comply with State guidelines and maintain a system for accounting for charged meals the Board shall:

- 1) allow charged meals to be the same regular reimbursable meals offered to all students, excluding extras, a la carte items, snacks (“competitive foods”) and adult meals. Non reimbursable food is expressly prohibited from being charged on account.
- 2) prohibits the action of denying a student the ability to purchase a reimbursable meal of their choice if they have money to pay for a meal that day.
- 3) allow the use of a computer generated point of sale system, which identifies and records all meals as well as collects 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 “a la carte” transactions.
- 4) allow free eligible students to receive a free reimbursable breakfast meal (available in Murphy, Gelinas, and WMHS) and reimbursable lunch meal of their choice each day. If meal charges are incurred prior to a student becoming eligible for Free meals the parent/guardian is responsible for the charges. Students eligible for a Free meal shall not be denied a reimbursable meal, even if they have accrued a negative balance, unless the student's parent or guardian has specifically provided written permission to the school to withhold a meal.
- 5) allow reduced price eligible students to receive a reimbursable breakfast meal (available in Murphy, Gelinas and WMHS) of their choice for \$.25 each day and reimbursable lunch meal of their choice each day for \$.25. If meal charges are incurred the charge meals offered to students will be the 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. Reduced price charges must be repaid. If meal charges are incurred prior to a student becoming eligible for Reduced Price Meals the parent/guardian is responsible for the regular cost of the meals charged.
- 6) Allow full Pay Students to pay for meals at the schools published paid meal rate each day. The charge meals offered to students will be the same 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.

- 7) allow the Child Nutrition Department within reason to limit or deny students purchases of a la carte items when they have five or more unpaid meal charges.
- 8) allow parents to submit a written request to deny their student the ability to charge meals.

Parents will be notified in writing of the students charge balance on a regular basis. The Child Nutrition Department will carefully consider all options regarding collection of charges and work with: Building Administration, Superintendent or Designee; and Social Services regarding these concerns.

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 schools' 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 account balance is exhausted and has accrued meal charges as follows: Parents/guardians of Elementary students that have charged meals will receive notification within 5 school days through a letter placed in the students' backpack. The notice will be sealed and non-descript on the outside. Parents of secondary students will receive a notice mailed home at the end of each month. Notification will continue until the account is replenished. Parents will be encouraged to sign up for MySchoolBucks.com and receive low balance and negative balance emails alerts. Currently there is no fee charged for families to sign up and utilize the low or negative balance alert features. Convenience fees are charged by myschoolbucks.com for funding accounts with a credit card. This fee is a responsibility of the parent/guardian. Parents must repay all unpaid charges remaining at the end of the year or before their child leaves the District, whichever occurs first. 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 resolved. The District will not use a debt collector (as defined in section eight hundred three of the federal consumer credit protection act, 15 U.S.D. Sec. 1692a).

PARENT OUTREACH:

The child nutrition department will communicate with parents/guardians who have children that owe five or more meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals through; phone call, email or mail.

School staff will make two documented attempts through; phone call, email or mail to reach out to those parents/guardians to complete a meal application in addition to the application and instructions provided in the school enrollment or start of year 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.

If a parent regularly fails to provide meal money and does not qualify for free or reduced price meals, the District may take other actions as appropriate, including notifying the local department of social services if neglect is suspected.

MINIMIZING STUDENT DISTRESS:

School will not publicly identify or stigmatize any student on the meal 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 reimbursable 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, if students inquire about account balances food service personnel will provide information limited to positive balances regarding current purchases and a la carte options or restrictions based on parental restrictions and funds available.

ONGOING ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION:

The Child Nutrition Department will conduct direct certification with NYSSIS or using NYSED Roster Upload to maximize free eligibility. NYSED provides updated direct certification data monthly.

School staff will provide parents/guardians with the free and reduced price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year, in school enrollment packet, and will post the application/instructions on the district website. Directions will clearly instruct parents/guardians that they are not required to complete the application if they are eligible to be directly certified.

In the event that electronic meal applications are utilized the school will provide to the parent/guardians an explanation of the process in the school enrollment packet and instructions on how to request a paper application at no cost.

The Child Nutrition Department will provide at least two additional free and reduced price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing 5 or more meal charges.

The District will encourage families to apply for free and reduced price meals and will provide applications to families in a language and reading level they can understand, and may offer individual assistance in filling out the application.

The District 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

The District will assign school liaisons as are required for homeless, foster, and migrant students and they shall coordinate with the Director of Child Nutrition providing necessary documentation to enable the qualification of eligible students for free school meals, in accordance with federal law.

The District will provide free and reduced price students a carryover of eligibility into the new school year for 30 days or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever is first.

Free or reduced price eligibility for transfer families indicating they were entitled at a previous district will be accepted after contacting the previous district; with the exception of students transferring from CEP or

provision 2 participating schools, they will be provided free eligibility for 30 days or until a new determination is made (whichever is first).

SCHOOL MEAL PAYMENTS AND REFUNDS:

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance. Cash, and checks, are accepted at both the cash registers in the cafeterias and at the Child Nutrition office located at 100 Suffolk Ave., Stony Brook, NY. Accounts may also be funded with a credit card through myschoolbucks.com (a processing fee is charged). Schools will encourage parents to maintain funds in student accounts to minimize the possibility that a child may be without meal money on any given day. Any remaining funds for a particular student will be carried over to the next school year.

Refunds of remaining account balances for withdrawn and graduated students may be provided only when a written or e-mailed request is submitted. For students who are graduating at the end of the year the district provides the option to transfer remaining funds to a sibling's account, with a written or e-mail request. When the graduating senior is the only student in the district a letter or email requesting a refund must be submitted by the parent/guardian. Unclaimed Funds must be requested within three months of withdrawal or graduation. After three months unclaimed funds become the property of the Three Village CSD Child Nutrition Program.

The District will ensure the non-profit food service account is reimbursed for all outstanding meal charges by no later than June 30th of each school year.

Nondiscrimination Statement: This explains what to do if you believe you have been treated unfairly.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.), should contact the Agency (State or local) where they applied for benefits. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form

http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, (AD-3027) found online and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;

(2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or

(3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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