

FOOD SERVICE MEAL CHARGEGeneral Overview

The South Colonie Central School District Board of Education promotes healthy students by supporting wellness practices and nutrition education so that all students can participate in positive dietary lifestyles/practices and recognizes the importance of good nutrition and its impact on student learning.

Purpose

One goal of the South Colonie Central School District is to provide student access to nutritious no- or low-cost meals each school day and to ensure that a student whose parent/guardian has unpaid school meal fees is not shamed or treated differently than a student whose parent/guardian does not have unpaid meal fees.

Unpaid charges place a financial burden on our school. The purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with federal requirements for the USDA Child Nutrition Program, and to provide oversight and accountability for the collection of outstanding student meal balances.

The intent of this policy is to establish procedures to address unpaid meal charges throughout the South Colonie 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 District provides this protocol as a courtesy to those students in the event that they forget or lose their meal money. Charging of items outside of the reimbursable meals (à la carte items, adult meals, etc.) is prohibited.

The District recognizes that on occasion, students may come to school without meal money. To ensure that students do not go hungry during the school day, promote responsible student behavior and minimize the revenue loss to the Food Services program, the District will allow students who are without meal money to charge the cost of a complete “reimbursable” meal of their choice each day. À la carte or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Repayment of meals charged shall be subject to the meal charge limits as outlined in the Administrative Regulations. It shall be the responsibility of the Superintendent of Schools, or his/her designee, to promulgate administrative regulations.

Reference: Education Law, Section 908
NYS Child Nutrition Program Administration “Charge Policy” Memo
(February 14, 2014)
USDA 2017 Edition: Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge: Proven
Strategies from Our Nation’s Schools (May 10, 2017)

NYS Child Nutrition Program Administration “Revised – New York State
Legislation: Prohibition Against Meal Shaming” Memo (June 8, 2018)
Meal Charge and Prohibition Against Meal Shaming Policy Template

Cross-Reference: 8500, Food Service Management
8520, Free and Reduced Price Food Services

Adopted: June 17, 2014
Revised: October 8, 2019; August 21, 2018; February 13, 2018

FOOD SERVICE MEAL CHARGE REGULATION

The following guidelines will be used to regulate meal charges in District schools:

A. Meal Charges

1. Free Meal Benefit: Free eligible students will be allowed to receive a free USDA “reimbursable” breakfast and lunch meal of their choice each day. À la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.
2. Reduced Meal Benefit: Reduced eligible students will be allowed to receive a USDA “reimbursable” breakfast of their choice at no cost and a lunch of their choice at no cost each day. Only complete, USDA “reimbursable.” meals may be charged. 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. À la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.
3. Full Pay Students: Students will pay for breakfast and lunch meals of their choice at the school’s published paid meal rate each day. Only complete, USDA “reimbursable” meals may be charged. 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.
4. Adults: No charging is allowed at breakfast or lunch (includes staff, guests, and visitors).
5. Special accommodations will be made for students with disabilities.
6. À la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid and may not be charged.
7. Students with negative account balances will not be able to purchase à la carte foods or other similar items until negative balances are paid in full.
8. Meal charges and subsequent repayments will be recorded and tracked daily through the Food Services POS system, based on the student’s meal status (reduced pay or full pay).

B. Ongoing Staff Training

1. Staff will be trained annually and throughout the year as needed on the procedures for managing meal charges using the New York State Education Department Webinar and other resources or the District's own training program.
2. Staff training shall include ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.

C. Parent Notification

1. Parents/guardians will be notified that a student's meal plan account balance is exhausted and has accrued meal charges within seven (7) days of the charge and every 30 days thereafter.
2. Negative balance letters will be mailed to the parents or guardians of elementary, middle school and high school students on a monthly basis. Electronic and telephone account alerts to households may also be utilized for notification of parents or guardians. Eligibility information for free and reduced price meals is mailed with the negative balance letters.
3. Food Service office staff, along with building principals and/or staff, will assist in alerting the households of negative balances, will make reasonable and discreet efforts to collect unpaid meals and will work to establish appropriate repayment plans based on family circumstances.
4. Parents and guardians shall have the option to set up an account to monitor account balances and/or make payments online through the Food Services POS system.
5. Students, parents or guardians may make payments in advance through MySchoolBucks or with a check payable to the South Colonie Central School District Food Service Account. Further details are available on the District website at www.southcolonieschools.org. Funds should be maintained in student meal accounts to minimize the possibility that a child may be without meal money on a given day.

D. Parent Outreach

1. Staff will communicate with parents/guardians with five or more meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals.
2. School staff will make two (2) 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.

3. School staff will contact the parent/guardian to offer assistance with the completion of a 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.

E. Minimizing Student Distress

1. 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.
2. Students who incur meal charges will not be required to wear a wristband, handstamp or any other identifying item or be required to complete tasks or work to pay for meals.
3. Schools will not throw away a meal after it has been served because of a student's inability to pay for the meal or because of outstanding meal charges.
4. Schools will not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid meal fees, but rather will deal directly with parents/guardians regarding unpaid school meal fees.

F. Ongoing Eligibility Certification

1. School staff will conduct direct certification with NYSSIS or use the NYSED Roster Upload, which provides updated direct certification data monthly, to maximize free eligibility.
2. School staff will provide parents/guardians with free and reduced price applications and instructions at the beginning of each school year.
3. Schools will provide at least two additional free and reduced price meal applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.
4. Schools will use administrative prerogative judiciously, only after making 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.
5. Schools will coordinate with the foster care, homeless, migrant and runaway coordinators to certify eligible students. School liaisons required for homeless, foster care and migrant students shall coordinate with the Food Service Department to ensure that such students receive free meals, in accordance with federal law.

G. Refunds, Unclaimed Funds and NSF Checks

1. Requests for refund of monies deposited in a student's meal account must be submitted in writing via letter or fax to the South Colonie Food Service Department – physical address: 102 Loralee Drive, Albany, New York 12205; or fax # (518) 869-6481.

2. Graduating students shall have the option of a refund or transfer of funds to a sibling’s account upon written request via letter or fax to the South Colonie Food Service Department – physical address: 102 Loralee Drive, Albany, New York 12205; or fax # (518) 869-6481.
3. Unclaimed funds must be requested within one school year. After one year, unclaimed funds shall become the property of the South Colonie Central School District Food Services Department.
4. Upon notification from the District’s financial institution, any check received that is deemed to have non-sufficient funds, shall be deducted from the student’s account.

H. Uncollectable Meal Charge Debt

In the event that a student has a negative balance and no payment has been received, the student will continue to receive a “reimbursable” meal until full payment is collected. Any student meal charges that remain unpaid at the end of the fiscal year shall be recorded as accounts receivable in the General Fund. At the close of the subsequent fiscal year, delinquent meal charge debt remaining from the prior fiscal year shall be deemed uncollectable and no further efforts will be made to obtain payment. The uncollectable debt shall be reclassified by the District Treasurer from accounts receivable to uncollectable debt and written off as an operating loss against the District’s General Fund Budget.

I. Annual Notice

The District will provide notice to all parents and households annually of this policy prior to the opening day of school, outlining the requirements of this policy. New students will be provided notice upon entrance. The regulation shall also be published on the District website, in District publications, and advertised via current District alert notification systems.

The Food Services Department will continue its efforts to notify and inform all households of the availability of the USDA Federal Free or Reduced Price Meal Program, in an effort to help all qualifying families receive these meal benefits.

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