

SUBJECT: MEAL CHARGING AND PROHIBITION AGAINST MEAL SHAMING

It is St. James School's goal to provide students with access to nutritious no- or low-cost meals each school day and to ensure that a student whose parent/guardian has unpaid meal charges is not shamed or treated differently than a student whose parent/guardian does not have unpaid meal charges.

Unpaid meal charges place a large financial burden on our lunch program. 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 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 in a way that does not stigmatize, distress, or embarrass students. The provisions of this policy pertain to regular priced reimbursable school lunch meals only. Charging of items outside of the reimbursable meals (a la carte items, adult meals, etc.) is expressly prohibited.

Access to Meals

- a) Free meal benefit eligible students will be allowed to receive a free lunch meal of their choice each day. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.
- b) Reduced meal benefit eligible students will be allowed to receive a lunch of their choice for 25 cents each day. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.
- c) Full pay students will pay for meals at the District's published paid meal rate each day. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Ongoing Staff Training

- a) Staff will be trained annually and throughout the year as needed on the procedures for managing meal charges using the State Education Department (SED) Webinar or the District's training program.
- b) Staff training will include ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.

Parent Notification

- a) Parents/guardians will be notified that a student's account balance is exhausted or low if they buy daily, in their weekly communications folder.
- b) Parents/guardians will be notified each week that a student has accrued charges on their account until the account is brought current

Parent Outreach

- a) Staff will communicate with parents/guardians with five or more unpaid meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals.
- b) 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.

- c) 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 student to have insufficient funds, offering any other assistance that is appropriate.

Minimizing Student Distress

- a) Staff will not publicly identify or stigmatize any student in line for a meal or discuss any outstanding meal debt in the presence of any other students.
- b) Students with unpaid meal charges will not be required to wear a wristband or handstamp, or to do chores or other work to pay for meals.
- c) Staff 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 unpaid meal charges.
- d) Staff will not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid meal charges.
- e) Staff will deal directly with parents/guardians regarding unpaid meal charges.

Ongoing Eligibility Certification

- a) Staff will conduct direct certification through the New York Student Identification System (NYSSIS) or using SED Roster Upload at least monthly to maximize free eligibility.
- b) Staff will provide parents/guardians with free and reduced price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year in the school enrollment packet.
- c) If the District uses an electronic meal application, it will provide an explanation of the process in the school enrollment packet and instructions on how to request a paper application at no cost.
- d) The District will provide at least two additional free and reduced price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.
- e) The District will use its administrative prerogative to complete an application on a student's behalf judiciously, and only after using exhaustive efforts to obtain a completed application from the student's parent/guardian. The District will complete the application using only available information on family size and income that falls within approvable guidelines.
- f) The District will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, and runaway coordinators at least monthly to certify eligible students.

Prepaid Accounts

Lunch can be purchased on our FACTS Family Portal. Parents may order lunches for their students up to a month in advance. Incidental billing is done once a month. The bills are generated on the 1st and due on the 15th for your student's lunches purchased the month before. Your bill can be paid online through your tuition account or you may send cash or check into the main office.

To obtain a refund for a withdrawn or graduating student, a written or e-mailed request for a refund of any money remaining in the student's account must be submitted. Students who are graduating at the end of the year will be given the option to transfer any remaining money to a sibling's account through a written request.

Unclaimed funds must be requested within one school year. Unclaimed funds will then become the property of the District Food Service Program.

Non-Discrimination Statement

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, (AD-3027) found online at: <https://www.usda.gov/oascr/filing-program-discrimination-complaint-usda-customer>, 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: CR-Info@USDA.gov

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.