

CHARGING SCHOOL MEALS AND PROHIBITION AGAINST SHAMING

The goal Saranac Central School District is 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 the District. 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 throughout the Saranac 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 and 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 breakfast and 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 breakfast of their choice for \$.25 and lunch of their choice for \$.25 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 permission to the District to withhold a meal. 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. The charges 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 District to withhold a meal. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Prepaid Accounts

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via www.myschoolbucks.com or with a check payable to **Saranac CSD School Lunch Fund**. Further details are available on the District's webpage at www.saranac.org under Departments and Nutrition Services. Funds should be maintained in accounts to minimize the possibility that a student may be without meal money on any given day. Any remaining funds for a particular student may be carried over to the next school year.

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 have any remaining money balances transferred to a sibling's account.

Parent Notification

- a) Parents are to be reminded of their responsibility in paying for their children's meals through the following methods:
Computerized School Messenger updates – Text messages, Email
Student Handbooks
District Website (under Departments, Nutrition Services)
Annual Distribution of District Meal Charge Policy
Balance Letters sent home 1 time per week via Postal Service
- b) The District utilizes a computerized messenger system that sends a text message and email to parents/guardians for any negative balances greater than \$2.00. The system will continue to send messages until the negative balance is less than \$2.00.
- c) Parents/ guardians are responsible for all charges incurred by students. In accordance with new regulations, no child will be denied a meal by a staff member at any time.

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.

Outstanding Balances

- a) Beginning with balances as of June 30, 2018, all balances will be carried forward on the student's individual account into the following school year. Parents/ guardians will be responsible for all charges made by their student.
- b) Payments on a student's account in subsequent school years will first be applied to any outstanding negative balances.
- c) The District will make reasonable attempts to return positive balances when a student graduates or otherwise separates from the District. After 90 days from separation, the balance will be closed and may be recovered by contacting the Food Service Administrative offices.

- d) Negative balances will be determined to be uncollectible and will become the property of the Saranac Central School District Food Service Program when:
- All efforts to collect have been exhausted, as described above, and the District deems the balance to be uncollectible; or
 - 90 days have passed from separation from the District (balances less than \$10.00); or
 - 2 fiscal years have passed since the negative balance was recorded (balances equal to or greater than \$10.00)

Adult Accounts

- a) Staff members are allowed to purchase food from the District's food services, however, all purchases must be paid for at the point of sale with cash or through a pre-payment account which may be set up through the School Food Service Director. Staff members are not permitted to charge meals to be repaid later.

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.

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.

Refr: 42 USC §1779 (Child Nutrition Act of 1966)
42 USC §§1758(f)(1); 1766(a) (National School Lunch Act)

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