

Meal Charge and Prohibition of Shaming Policy

I. Purpose

The goal of the Schenevus School Cafeteria 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 Schenevus 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 Schenevus School Cafeteria 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 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. 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 permission to the school to withhold a meal. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

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 and has accrued meal charges of \$5.00 or more within 30 days of the charge and then every 4 weeks thereafter. If a parent regularly fails to provide meal money and the student does not qualify for free or reduced price meals, the district may take other actions as appropriate, including but not limited to, notifying the local department of social services if neglect is suspected.

PARENT OUTREACH:

- Staff will communicate with parents/guardians with five or more meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals.
- School 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.
- 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.
- 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. The district shall not attempt to recover unpaid meal charges using a debt collector as defined in federal law (15 USC §1692a). Students with unpaid meal charges at the start of the school year will be allowed to charge reimbursable meals. The district shall offer repayment plans until charges are paid, and the district reserves the right to take all actions that are legally available to collect from parents the outstanding amounts owed to it for unpaid balances, which do not result in harm or shame to the child.

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 handstamp, or to do chores or work to pay for meals.
- Schools will not serve alternate meals and 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 in school enrollment packet.
- 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.
- Schools 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.
- 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 cash or with a check payable to *Schenevus School Cafeteria*. Further details are available on our webpage at schenevuscs.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 withdrawn, and graduating students; a written or e-mailed request for a refund of any money remaining in their account must be submitted. Funds of students who are graduating at the end of the year will be transferred to a sibling's account unless a refund request is submitted.

Unclaimed Funds must be requested within one school year. Unclaimed funds will then become the property of the Schenevus Central School Food Service Program.