

CHARGING SCHOOL MEALS AND PROHIBITION AGAINST SHAMING REGULATION

I. Purpose

The goal of the Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen Lunch Program 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 financial burden on our school. The purpose of this policy is to insure 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 Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen (the "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 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. A student will be allowed to charge a maximum of 5 meals to their account after the balance reaches zero. 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.

A student will be allowed to charge a maximum of \$14.50 to their account after the balance reaches zero. 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.

Student Account Balance Notification:

- Parents/guardians shall be discreetly notified of student account balances regularly. When a student's account balance falls to \$5.00 and whenever a meal is charged, the district will discreetly notify the parent/guardian of the balance, and the process to refill the account. This notification will continue regularly until the account is replenished. Parents/guardians 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 discreetly notify parents/guardians of students with negative balances of at least five meals, determine if the student is directly certified to be eligible for free meals, and attempt to reach the parent/guardian to assist them in the application process for free and/or reduced price meals, and determine if there are other issues within the household causing the insufficient funds and offer appropriate assistance. If a parent/guardian 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.
- The school district shall notify all parents/guardians in writing on an annual basis at the start of the school year and to families transferring during the year, outlining the requirements of this policy. The policy shall also be published in appropriate school and district publications. All staff involved in implementing and enforcing this policy shall also be notified of these requirements and their responsibilities. The district's enrollment process shall include the application process for free and reduced price meals. If the district becomes aware that a student is so eligible, it shall file an application for the student. Staff responsible for assisting foster, homeless and migrant students shall coordinate with the food services staff to ensure such students receive free school meals.

Unpaid Meal Charges and Debt Collection

- Unpaid meal charges are a financial burden to the district and taxpayers and can negatively affect the school program. 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. The district shall notify parents/guardians of unpaid meal charges at regular intervals, and may engage in collection activities by district staff, which do not involve debt collectors as defined in federal law (15 USC §1692a), and may not charge fees or interest or file a lawsuit against students’ parents or guardians. 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 paid.

Parent Outreach:

- School staff will communicate with parents/guardians with five or more unpaid 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.

Minimizing Student Stress:

- 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.
- Students with unpaid meal charges will not be required to wear a wristband of handstamp, or to do chores or work to pay for meals.
- Schools 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 unpaid 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.
- Schools will not serve alternate meals (i.e., cheese sandwich).

- The District will not use a debt collector to collect unpaid meal debt.

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 the 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.
- School staff will provide at least two additional free and reduced-price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.
- School staff will use administrative prerogative judiciously to, for example, offer assistance with a meal application or complete and file such application for a student, only after using exhaustive efforts to obtain a completed application from the parent/guardian and only with available information on family size and income that falls within approvable guidelines.
- Schools will coordinate with foster, homeless, migrant, and runaway coordinators to ensure eligible students receive free school meals.

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via *myschoolbucks.com* or with a check payable to “Valley Stream Union Free School District Thirteen Lunch Fund.” Further details are available on our webpage at *www.valleystream13.com*. 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 will be carried over to the next school year.

Refunds for withdrawn and graduating students: a written or emailed request for a refund of any money remaining in their account must be submitted. Students who are graduating at the end of the year will be given the option to transfer to a sibling’s account with a written request or phone call to the School Lunch Office (516) 872-7784. Unclaimed Funds must be requested with on school year. Unclaimed Funds will then become property of the Valley Stream UFSD 13 Food Service Program.

Cross-ref: 8520, Free and Reduced-Price Meal Services

Ref: 42 USC §1779 (Child Nutrition Act of 1966)
42 USC §§1758(f)(1); 1766(a) (National School Lunch Act)
2 CFR §200.426 (accounting for debt in federal programs)

7 CFR §§210.9 210.12; 210.19; 220.13; 245.5 (accounting in federal school meal programs)

Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (Public Law 111-296), §143

15 USC §1692a (debt collector defined)

Education Law §908

USDA Report to Congress, *Review of Local Policies on Meal Charges and Provision of Alternate Meals*, June 2016,

www.fus.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnlunpaidmealcharges-report.pdf

Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A, USDA FNS Memo SP 57-2016 (09/16/16), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP57-2016os.pdf>

Unpaid Meal Charges: Guidance and Q&A, USDA FNS Memo SP 23-2017 (03/23/17),

<https://fus-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP23-2017os.pdf>

Unpaid Meal Charges: Clarification on Collection of Delinquent Meal Payments, USDA FNS Memo SP 47-2016 (07/08/16).

www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/SP47-2016os.pdf.

Overcoming the Unpaid Meal Challenge-Proven Strategies from Our Nation's Schools, USDA FNS Guidance Document (May 2017),

<https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/cn/SP29-2017al.pdf>.

New York State Legislation-Prohibition Against Meal Shaming, NYSED Memo (5/1/18), <http://www.cn.nysed.gov/content/prohibition-against-meal-shaming>.

Meal Charge Plan Template, NYSED (5/1/18),

<http://www.cn.nysed.gov/content/meal-charge-and-prohibition-against-meal-shaming-policy-template>.

1st Reading for Adoption: September 25, 2018

2nd Reading & Adoption: October 23, 2018

1st Reading for Re-Adoption: September 22, 2021

2nd Reading & Re-Adoption: November 22, 2021