

**SUBJECT: FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM/ MEAL CHARGE POLICY**

The goal of the District is to provide student access to nutritious no-cost 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. 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 charges so that a student is not stigmatized, distressed, or embarrassed. The provisions of this policy pertain to regular priced reimbursable school breakfast and lunch meals only.

**MEAL CHARGE POLICY:**

The District Food Service Department should be operated in the most economical, efficient, and effective manner, given student needs and District resources. Unpaid meal charges place a large financial burden on the District. The Board recognizes that occasionally students may not have enough funds for a meal. To ensure the students do not go hungry, the Board will allow students who do not have enough funds to ‘charge’ the cost of meals to be repaid subject to the terms of this policy.

The District participates in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program to receive commodities and subsidies from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In return, the District provides free and reduced-price meals to elementary and secondary students in its schools and serves meals that meet federal requirements.

**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. They may charge these meals if unable to pay at the time, unless the student’s parent or guardian has specifically provided written permission to the Food Service Department Supervisor to withhold a meal. The charge meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals available to all students. 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. They may charge these meals if unable to pay at the time, unless the student’s parent or guardian has specifically provided written permission to the Food Service Department Supervisor to

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withhold a meal. The charge meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals available to all students. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

The Superintendent or designee will carry out the rules of these programs. The District's Reviewing Official and Verification Official or the Department of Social Services Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) will determine student eligibility. Appeals regarding eligibility should be submitted to the District's Hearing Official.

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via [www.myschoolbucks.com](http://www.myschoolbucks.com) or with a check payable to Chatham CSD. Further details are available on our webpage at [www.chathamcentralschools.com](http://www.chathamcentralschools.com). Any remaining funds for a specific student will be carried over to the next school year.

Parents who do not want their child to charge must provide the Food Service Department Supervisor with written notification either by mail or by email.

The District's Food Service Department supervisor is responsible for maintaining charge records and reviewing the outstanding balances for students once a week. Each week the supervisor will send letters home for students with outstanding balances exceeding \$10.

No student with unpaid charges will be prohibited from purchasing food if they have money that day.

District staff may engage in collection activities which do not involve debt collectors as defined in federal law (15 USC §1692a), but the District may not charge fees or interest.

**ONGOING STAFF TRAINING:**

- District 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.
- District staff training includes instruction on ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced-price meals.

**PARENT NOTIFICATION:**

- The District will notify parents/guardians of unpaid meal charges at regular intervals.

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- The District will notify parents/guardians when a student's prepaid meal card or account balance falls below \$6, and then weekly thereafter.

**PARENT OUTREACH:**

- The District will distribute its meal-charge policy and procedures in writing to all households and applicable staff at the start of each school year, and to new households that transfer into the District during the school year. The District will also provide details regarding payment methods on its website. District staff will communicate with parents/guardians once \$10 worth of meals is charged to determine the student's eligibility for free or reduced-price meals.
- District staff will make two documented attempts to reach out to parents/guardians to complete a meal application once \$10 worth of meals has been charged.
- District staff will assist with completion of the meal application upon request. District staff will also try to determine if there are other issues within the household causing the student to have insufficient funds and will offer any other assistance that may be appropriate.

**MINIMIZING STUDENT DISTRESS:**

- The District 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 other work to pay for meals.
- School cafeteria 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.
- The District will not take any action directed at a pupil to collect unpaid school meal fees.
- The District will deal directly with parents/guardians regarding unpaid school meal fees.

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**ONGOING ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION:**

- District staff will conduct direct certification with NYSSIS or using NYSED Roster Upload at least monthly to maximize free eligibility.
- District staff will provide parents/guardians with free and reduced-price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year in each school enrollment packet.
- The District will provide at least two additional free and reduced-price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.
- The District may use its administrative prerogative to prepare an application on behalf of a student using available information on family size and income that falls within approvable guidelines; however, it must do so judiciously and only after using exhaustive efforts to obtain a completed application from the parent/guardian.
- Schools will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, runaway coordinators at least monthly to certify eligible students.

**Refunds for Credit Balances**

Parents/guardians must submit a written or e-mailed request to (i) obtain a refund of any money remaining in the account of a withdrawn or graduating student, or (ii) transfer such funds to a sibling's account. Parents can contact the Food Service Supervisor at 518-392-1536 or email through the school's website for more information.

**Prohibition Against Adults Charging Meals**

Adults must pay for their meals at the time of service or set up pre-paid accounts.

This policy is to be reviewed annually.

*Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004, PL 108-265*  
*Child Nutrition Act 1966, 42 USC § 1771 et seq.*  
*Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act 1946, 42 USC § 1751 et seq.*  
*Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 USC § 794 et seq.*  
*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 20 USC §§ 1400-1485*  
*7 CFR Parts 15B, 210 and 220*

Non-Instructional/Business  
Operations

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*Education Law §§ 902(b), 915, 918, 1604(28), 1709(22), 1709(23) and 2503(9)(a)*

*8 NYCRR §§ 200.2(b)(1) and 200.2(b)(2)*

*Social Services Law § 95*

*New York State Legislation - Prohibition Against Meal Shaming*

*NYSED Memo (5/1/18)*

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

*NOTE: Refer also to Policy # 5661 - Wellness*