

NUTRITION SERVICES: MEALS, MEAL CHARGING AND PROHIBITION AGAINST FOOD SHAMING

The Board recognizes that good nutrition is related to students' physical and psychological well-being and their readiness to learn. The RSU 8 schools shall participate, as feasible, in the National School Lunch and other food programs that may be available (e.g. school breakfast program, after school snack program).

However, the Board also recognizes that unpaid meal fees ("meal charges") impose a significant financial burden on the District.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with federal requirements for the school unit's Child Nutrition Program, to provide oversight and accountability in the collection of outstanding student meal balances, and to ensure that students are not shamed or stigmatized for having unpaid meal charges.

The provisions of this policy pertain to priced reimbursable school breakfast, lunch and snacks only.

Items outside of reimbursable meals (a la carte items, adult meals, etc.) must be paid upon purchase or be prepaid; no charging will be permitted.

MEAL BENEFITS

The RSU 8 schools will provide a reimbursable meal to any student who requests a meal and is otherwise eligible for the meal regardless of the student's inability to pay for the school meal or failure in the past for school meals.

PROHIBITION ON PUNISHMENT RELATED TO UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

- Students with unpaid meal charges will not be required to do chores or work as a means of paying for one or more meals or as punishment for not paying for one or more meals.
- Staff will not require a student to throw away a meal after it has been served to the student.
- Staff will not refuse a meal to a student as a form of disciplinary action.

PROHIBITION ON FOOD SHAMING AND STIGMATIZATION

RSU 8 schools will not openly identify or otherwise stigmatize a student who cannot pay for a meal or who has payments due for previous meals.

- Staff will not openly identify or stigmatize any student in line for a meal or discuss any outstanding meal debt in the presence of other students.
- A student with unpaid meal charges will not be required to wear a wristband or anything that differentiates him/her from other students.
- Staff communication about a student's meal debts must be made to the parent/guardian of the student rather than directly to the student, except that if a student asks about his/her meal debt, staff may answer the student's inquiry. Staff may ask a student to carry to his/her parent/guardian a letter regarding the student's meal debt.

PARENT OUTREACH

School staff will provide parents with a free and reduced-price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year.

School staff will provide at least two additional free and reduced-price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.

NOTIFICATION AND COLLECTION OF UNPAID MEAL CHARGES

Schools will not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid meal charges.

School staff will notify a student's parent/guardian by phone or email that the student has accrued meal charges when the amount due has reached \$20.

School staff will offer assistance with completion of the application to determine if there are other issues within the household resulting in the child having insufficient funds, offering any other assistance that is appropriate.

A second attempt will be made if the balance remains outstanding after 30 days of the first notification, with a follow up on writing.

If debt remains unpaid after 30 days of the second attempt, the school will follow such guidelines as may be developed by the Maine Department of Education for the collection of student meal debt, or take such action as deemed appropriate within the limits of applicable law and/or regulations.

Legal Reference: 20-A MRSA § 6681

Adopted: 10