

Pal-Mac Central Schools

Meal Charging and Prohibition Against Meal Shaming Plan

It is the District's goal 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 plan 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 provisions of this plan pertain to regular priced reimbursable school breakfast, lunch and snack 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. Full pay students will be allowed to receive a breakfast of their choice and a lunch of their choice at the district's current full price meal rate. A student will be allowed to charge a maximum of \$100.00 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 District to withhold a meal. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

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.
- b) Staff training will include ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.

Parent Notification

To notify parents about account status, food service staff will provide notices to parents using a parent-provided email and/or US Mail to ensure confidentiality.

- Confidential weekly notices will be provided to parents of students whose delinquent debt equals \$20 or more.
- A confidential warning notice will be provided by US Mail with delivery to parents of students whose delinquent debt equals \$75 or more.
- A confidential final notice will be provided by US Mail with delivery confirmation to parents of students whose delinquent debt equals \$100 or more. Effective 10 calendar days from the date of the final notice, the student will no longer be eligible to charge meals.
- Notices regarding delinquent debt will continue until the balance has been paid or until the parties have agreed upon satisfactory repayment term

Parent Outreach

- a) Staff will make every attempt to determine if a student is directly certified and eligible for free meals.
- b) In addition to sending home the income application at the beginning of the year, staff will make two additional attempts to encourage the parent or guardian to complete an income application on behalf of the child.

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- 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.

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) The District will provide at least two additional free and reduced price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.
- d) 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.
- e) The District will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, and runaway coordinators at least monthly to certify eligible students.

Prepaid Accounts

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via “myschoolbucks.com” or with a check payable to Pal-Mac CSD. . Further details are available on the District's webpage at www.palmaccsd.org. Funds should be maintained in accounts to minimize the possibility that a student may be without meal money on any given day.

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 be given the option to transfer any remaining money to a sibling's account through a written request.

Unclaimed funds must be requested within one school year. Unclaimed funds will then become the property of the District Food Service Program.