Meal Charge and Prohibition against Meal Shaming Policy Policy No.: 5421

I. Purpose

The goal of the Mahopac Central School District 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.

However, 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 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 Mahopac Central School District. The provisions of this policy pertain to regular priced school breakfast and lunch meals only. The Mahopac Central School District provides this policy as a courtesy to those students in the event that they forget or lose their lunch 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 (if actively participating) and lunch of their choice each day. A la carte purchases must be paid/prepaid.
- Reduced Meal Benefit - Reduced eligible students will be allowed to receive a breakfast of their choice (if actively participating) for no cost and lunch of their choice for no cost each day. A la carte purchases must be paid/prepaid.
- Full Pay Students – Students will pay for meals at the school's published paid meal rate each day. If a student is without meal money on a consistent basis, the administration will investigate the situation more closely and take further action as needed. If financial hardship exists, parents and families are encouraged to apply for free or reduced price lunches for their child if applicable. A student will be allowed to charge meals to their account after the balance reaches zero. The "charged" meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals that are available to all students. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.
- Parents/Guardians are responsible for meal payment to the food service program. Discreet notices of low or deficit balances will be sent monthly during the school year by email to parents and guardians.

- Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via MySchoolBucks.com or with a check payable to Mahopac School Lunch Fund. Further details are available on our webpage at www.Mahopac.k12.ny.us. 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 may be submitted in writing via mail or email for a refund of any money remaining in their account. 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.
- Unclaimed Funds must be requested within one school year. Unclaimed funds will then become the property of the Mahopac Central School District Food Service Program.
- Balances Owed collection of owed balances will follow the policies and procedures set by the school.

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:

- The Child Nutrition Coordinator will email notices on a monthly basis for all student accounts with a low balance ($5.00 or less) and for accounts that have a negative balance.

PARENT OUTREACH:

- School social workers will communicate with parents/guardians with five or more meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals.
- School social workers 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.
- If a student has an outstanding debt of $10 or more, the Food Service Department or Child Nutrition Coordinator will contact the principal. The principal will refer the matter to the school social worker or school counselor who will contact the family.

MINIMIZING STUDENT DISTRESS:

- School staff 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.
- School 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 meal charges.
- School staff will not take any action directed at a pupil to collect unpaid school meal fees.
- School staff 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 to maximize free eligibility. NYSED provides updated direct certification data monthly.
- School staff will provide parents/guardians with free and reduced price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year and in the school enrollment packet.
- School staff 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.
- School staff will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, runaway coordinators to certify eligible students. School liaisons required for homeless, foster, and migrant students shall coordinate with the nutrition department to make sure such students receive free school meals, in accordance with federal law.

Ref: New York State Education Law 908 as added by Section 2 of Part B of Chapter 56 of the laws of 2018 *Prohibition Against Meal Shaming*. Child Nutrition Act of 1966, 42 U.S.C. 1771 et seq. National School Lunch Act, 42 U.S.C. 1715 et seq. Guidance Document, New York State Education Department, Child Nutrition Program; "Establishing a Meal Charge Policy," August 2005

Adoption date: February 12, 2013

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