Shepard Schools Unpaid Meal Policy

Shepard Preparatory High School and Shepard School recognize the important link between proper nutrition and academic success. The purpose of this policy is to establish a consistent procedure for charging meals when students do not have money to pay, preventing meal charged, and ensuring eligible children are certified for free and reduced priced school meals.

Charging Meals:

Because hunger is an impediment to learning, no child shall be denied a school meal because of an inability to pay. Children will be served a meal that meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrition standards for School meals:

- *School districts can allow students to charge reimbursable meals up to a certain number of meals or dollar amount and then provide an alternate meal after that.*

Hand stamps, stickers, or any other means of overt identification of children with unpaid meal debt in the cafeteria or the classroom are prohibited. Additionally, children with unpaid meal debt shall not be required to work off their debt, including, but not limited to, wiping down tables or cleaning the cafeteria.

Preventing meal charges:

To ensure that all eligible families are certified for free and reduced-priced school meals, the school nutrition department shall:

- Provide all households with school meal applications prior to the start of the school year and/or include instructions for completing online school meal applications;
- Provide school meal applications in the primary language of the parent or guardian and provide assistance with completing an application for any household that requests assistance;
- Promptly utilize data provided by the state or other school district officials to certify eligible children without an application; and

- Assure that any child for whom the schools are not able to obtain a completed school meal application, but become aware of their eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals shall be certified based on an application submitted by the appropriate school official, as permitted by USDA guidance.

To ensure that households are aware of negative account balances and the potential to accrue meal debt, the school nutrition department will:

-send out low balance notices prior to student needing to charge meals;

- Notify and/or work with the principals, schools counselors, and/or teachers to understand the student and parent's situation and if a school meal application is needed;

- use a calling system to notify parents of negative balances; and

- use email alert to notify parents of negative balances

Collecting unpaid meal debt:

All communication regarding unpaid meal debt shall be directed at parents or guardians. Schools may send children home with a letter in an unmarked envelope.

Prior to contacting households regarding unpaid marl debt, the schools shall ensure that the student is not participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, or other federal programs, which would confer categorical eligibility for free school meals, or is not homeless, migrant, or in foster care, and would allow them to be certified without an application.

Any household with a negative school lunch account balance shall be immediately by school nutrition staff by email, phone, or letter home to provide information on how to apply for free or reduced-price school meals or to add funds to the school nutrition account.

For households that cannot afford to pay their school meal charges, the school will work with them to establish a payment plan. Households that are subsequently certified for free or reduced-price school meals at a point later in the school year shall not immediately be required to repay school meal debt accrued in that school year. The school will submit retroactive claims for any meals charged to the household from the date of application to the date of certification, to the extent allowed by USDA guidance.

USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/divisions/fn/pdf/Form%20213%20USDA%20Nondiscrimination%20Statement%20(EnglishSpanish)%2011.2015.pdf