

## Meal Charge Policy

### I. Purpose

The goal of the **Edinburg Common School Cafeteria** 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.

The intent of this policy is to ensure that the student is not stigmatized or embarrassed or distressed as well as establish procedures to address unpaid meal charges to the Edinburg Common School Cafeteria beginning September 1, 2017. The provisions of this policy pertain to regular priced school breakfast, lunch and snack (if applicable) meals only. The **Edinburg Common School Cafeteria** 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 meal eligible students will be allowed to receive a free breakfast and lunch each day. A la carte purchases must be paid/prepaid.
- Reduced Meal Benefit - Reduced meal eligible students will be allowed to receive a breakfast for \$.25 and lunch for \$.25 each day. A student will be allowed to charge a maximum of four 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.
- Meal Application – School staff 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.
- Meal Application – 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.
- 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 a maximum of **four** meals to their account after the balance reaches zero. The charge meals offered to students will be reimbursable meals that are available to all students.

- Parents/Guardians are responsible for meal payment to the food service program. Discreet notices of low or deficit balances will be sent to parents/guardians at regular intervals during the school year.
- Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance via a check payable to **Edinburg Common School**. Further details are available via the office. 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; a written or e-mailed request for a refund of any money remaining in their account must be submitted. 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 be then become the property of the **Edinburg Common School** Food Service Program.
- Balances Owed collection of owed balances will follow the policies and procedures set forth below.
  - The Food Service Director shall maintain charge records and review all monthly accounts with unpaid funds.
  - Automatic email/letters to any family that has unpaid funds greater than \$5.00 on a monthly basis, sent by the food service director.
  - If the balance climbs greater than \$25.00, the Business Office shall communicate the balance owed to the family, which informs the family that if the balance remains unpaid, the account may be turned over for collections efforts, including potentially Small Claims.
  - If the balance becomes greater than \$50.00, or if no payments are made on the debt for more than 4 months, then a letter from the Superintendent is issued.
  - Finally, if the debt increases beyond \$100.00, or at the discretion of the Superintendent, the District may request attorney/collections intervention, including potentially filing in Small Claims Court.
- Minimizing Students Distress:
  - School 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 handstamps, or to do chores or work to pay for meals.

- Schools 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.
- Schools will not take any action directed at a pupil to collect unpaid school meal fees.
- Schools 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 at least monthly to maximize free eligibility.
  - School staff will provide parents/guardians with free and reduced price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year in school enrollment packet.
  - Schools using electronic meal application will provide an explanation of the process in the school enrollment packet and instructions on how to request a paper application at no cost.
  - Schools 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 parents/guardian only with available information on family size and income that falls within approvable guidelines.
  - Schools will coordinate with the foster, homeless, migrant, runaway coordinators at least monthly to certify eligible students.

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.

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