

Merritt Academy Meal Charge and Meal Shaming Policy

I. Purpose

The goal of Merritt Academy is to provide student access to nutritious no- or low-cost meals each school day and to ensure that a student whose parent/guardian has unpaid school meal fees is not shamed or treated differently than a student whose parent/guardian does not have unpaid meal fees.

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 Merritt Academy in a way that does not stigmatize, distress or embarrass students. The provisions of this policy pertain to regular priced reimbursable school breakfast and lunch meals only. Merritt Academy provides this policy as a courtesy to those students in the event that they forget or lose their money. Charging of items outside of the reimbursable meals is expressly prohibited.

II. Policy

Free Meal Benefit – Free eligible students will be allowed to receive a free reimbursable breakfast and lunch meal of their choice each day. A la cart items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Reduced Meal Benefit – Reduced eligible students will be allowed to receive a reimbursable breakfast and lunch at no charge.

Full Pay Students – Students will pay for meals at the school's published paid meal rate each day. The charge meals offered to the students will be reimbursable meals available to all students, unless the student's parent or guardian has specifically provided written permission to the school to withhold a meal.

STAFF TRAINING

- *Staff will be trained annually and as needed on the procedures for managing meal charges using the schools training program.*
- *Staff training includes ongoing eligibility certification for free or reduced price meals.*

PARENT NOTIFICATION

- *Parents/guardians will be notified by phone or electronically by the food service department that a student's meal account balance is exhausted. After the balance exceeds \$27.50 the student may not be given a reimbursable meal.*

PARENT OUTREACH

- *Staff will communicate with parents/guardians with five or more meal charges to determine eligibility for free or reduced price meals.*
- *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 on paperwork night.*
- *School staff will contact the parent/guardian to offer assistance with completion of meal application to determine if there are any other issues within the household causing the child to have insufficient funds, offering any other assistance that is appropriate.*

MINIMIZING STUDENT DISTRESS

- *Merritt Academy 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, hand stamp, or to do chores or work to pay for meals.*
- *Merritt Academy 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.*
- *Merritt Academy will not take any action directed at a student to collect unpaid school meal account balances.*
- *Merritt Academy will deal directly with parents/guardians regarding unpaid school meal account balances.*

ONGOING ELIGIBILITY CERTIFICATION

- *School staff will conduct direct certification using the MSDS report. MSDS provides direct certification report monthly.*
- *School staff will provide parents/guardians with free and reduced price meal application and instructions at the beginning of each school year on paperwork day.*
- *Schools will provide at least two additional free and reduced price meal 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 meal application from the parent/guardian only with available information on family size and income that falls within approvable guidelines.*
- *Schools will coordinate with 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.*

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance by check or cash payable to Merritt Academy Lunch Program. For further information phone Merritt Academy at 586 749-6000. 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 then become the property of the Merritt Academy Food Service Program.

USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: [USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form](#), from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. **mail:**
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. **fax:**
(833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. **email:**
Program.Intake@usda.gov