Cardinal O'Hara High School

Meal Charge and Prohibition Against Meal Shaming Policy for **2025-2026** School Year

I. Purpose

The goal of the Cardinal O'Hara High School 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.

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, 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 *Cardinal O'Hara High School (COHS)* in a way that does not stigmatize, distress or embarrass students. The provisions of this policy pertain to regular priced reimbursable school breakfast, lunch and snack meals only. The Cardinal O'Hara High School 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 (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 lunch meal of their choice each day. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Reduced Meal Benefit - Reduced eligible students will be allowed to receive a lunch of their choice for *($.25)* each day. 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 direction stating that his/her child does not have permission to charge. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

Full Pay Students - Students will pay for meals at the school's published paid meal rate each day. 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 school to withhold a meal. A la carte items or other similar items must be paid/prepaid.

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:

- Parents/guardians will be notified that a student's meal card or account balance is exhausted and has accrued meal charges within __3___ days of the charge and then every ___7____ days/weeks thereafter.

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 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.

MINIMIZING STUDENT DISTRESS:

- COHS 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.
- COHS 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.
- COHS will not take any action directed at a pupil to collect unpaid school meal fees.
- COHSs will deal directly with parents/guardians regarding unpaid school meal fees.
- COHS will not serve alternate meals to students in need of a lunch.
- COHS will provide translated applications, as needed.

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.

- COHS staff will provide parents/guardians with free and reduced price application and instructions at the beginning of each school year in school enrollment packet.

- COHS, when 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.

- COHS will provide at least two additional free and reduced price applications throughout the school year to families identified as owing meal charges.

- COHS 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.

- COHS 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.

- COHS will not use a debt collector for outstanding lunch debt.

Students/Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance with a check payable to *{Cardinal O'Hara High School Cafeteria}*. 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 Cardinal O'Hara High School Food Service Program.