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**Statement Regarding District Policy 8550 –  
Unpaid Meal Charges/Outstanding Food Service Charges  
August 15, 2019**

During the Board of Education’s Committee of the Whole meeting on Tuesday, August 13, 2019, [District Policy 8550 – Unpaid Meal Charges/Outstanding Food Service Charges](#) was discussed at length. This policy has been in effect for the past two academic years, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. This is a mandatory policy that is required by New Jersey Statute, for all public school districts in the state. The New Jersey Statute states:

**18A:33-21 Schools meals, notification to parent of payment in arrears before denying to student.**

*1. In the event that a school district determines that a student's school breakfast or school lunch bill is in arrears, the district shall contact the student's parent or guardian to provide notice of the arrearage and shall provide the parent or guardian with a period of 10 school days to pay the amount due. If the student's parent or guardian has not made full payment by the end of the 10 school days, then the district shall again contact the student's parent or guardian to provide notice that school breakfast or school lunch, as applicable, shall not be served to the student beginning one week from the date of the second notice unless payment is made in full.*

The policy was not developed lightly, and in fact in the two years since its adoption it has not been followed to its entirety. Specifically, this part of the policy: “[an] alternate meal will be provided until the bill is in arrears in excess of \$20.00, at which time the student will not be served school breakfast or lunch, as applicable” was not followed at all. Children have not been denied a meal. Children need to eat, need to be nourished, need to be protected and taken care of in our schools. We hire the best of the best staff at every level in our schools, in every job title, who are required every day to look out for the students in our care.

For the past several years, the Cherry Hill Public School District has been challenged by unpaid balances on student lunch accounts. By 2017, delinquent accounts had reached approximately \$25,000. Immediately prior to implementing the policy in 2017, all delinquent accounts were cleared by the District. No money was collected from the owing families. All accounts were brought to a zero balance, so that all families had a “clean slate” when the policy went into effect.

Since the implementation of the policy, 343 accounts are in arrears by \$10 or more, amounting to a deficit of \$14,383. Families with delinquent accounts greater than \$10 are notified with the following procedures:

- The CHPS business office sends a letter home, via US Mail, every 10 days until the balance is paid. The letter encourages parents to reach out to the district to discuss payment options and explains how they can sign up for the free and reduced price lunch program. English and

Spanish versions of the letter are always at the ready. The letter also can be translated into any language necessary.

- Each school's principal receives a list of students who are having these letters mailed home, and in turn, the student's principal or guidance counselor calls the home to check in with the family.
- When an account reaches \$10 in arrears, and after a minimum of two letters have been mailed home and more than three weeks has elapsed, the student is served an alternative meal, of a tunafish sandwich on wheat bread, milk or juice and a choice of fruits and vegetables.

When an account reaches \$20 in arrears, the policy states the student is not to be served a meal, which again, has not been followed.

The District has been successful in receiving responses from some families whose accounts are in arrears, and has been able either to assist them in signing up for free and reduced price lunch or, for those who do not qualify for that program, setting up assistance with a payment plan. Assisting families in accessing the benefits the free and reduced price lunch program is a direct benefit to the child and to the district. On a case-by-case basis, delinquencies have been forgiven for families who do not qualify for free and reduced price lunch, but who are facing hardships nonetheless. Additional social services and community supports can be, and have been, arranged for families. One of the most important things we can do is support our children and families who are in need. Many in our community are challenged by current economic conditions, many families are food insecure. As a district, we began a program during the past academic year to send food backpacks home on Fridays with a number of our children, across multiple schools. We endeavor to ensure that all families have the support that they require for their children to thrive in our community.

Still, there are certain families who do not respond to outreach from the District and from their schools. Others respond that although they are not facing any hardships, they have no intention of paying their bill at all.

The District and the Board of Education now are faced with how to proceed. This was the basis for the Board of Education to engage in a public conversation at the meeting this past Tuesday evening – a conversation that will continue at the next board meeting. The Board conducted a lengthy and public discussion on the topic. This discussion may be viewed on the videotape of the entire meeting, archived on the [District YouTube channel](#). The discussion begins at 54:05.

No vote nor action was taken at the August 13 meeting. The topic will be included as a discussion item on the Agenda of the Board of Education Action Meeting on August 27, 2019 at 7 pm in the Malberg Administration Building. The meeting is open to the public and will be livestreamed on the [CHPS YouTube channel](#).

In the interim, if you have questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Dr. Joseph Meloche  
Superintendent of Schools