

File: EFD - MEAL CHARGE POLICY

The School Committee is committed to providing students with healthy, nutritious meals each day so they can focus on school work, while also maintaining the financial integrity of the meal programs and minimizing any impact on students with meal charges. However, unpaid meal charges place a large financial burden on the school district, as the food service program is a self-supporting entity within the district. The purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with federal and state reporting requirements of the USDA Child Nutrition Program, as well as provide oversight and accountability for the collection of outstanding student meal balances.

The provisions of this policy pertain to reimbursable school meals only. The School Committee will provide a reimbursable meal to students who forget or lose their lunch money.

Meal Charges and Balances

Students will pay for meals at the regular rate approved by the School Committee and for their meal status (regular, reduced-price, or free) each day. Payment options will be delineated in student handbooks and provided to parents of incoming students. After the balance reaches zero and enters the negative, students will not be allowed to purchase a la carte items including but not limited to a second entrée, snack, ice cream, or an additional beverage. The student will still be allowed to take a meal, and that meal will continue to be charged to the account at the standard lunch rate based on their meal status. The parent/guardian is responsible for any charges incurred. If there is a financial hardship, a parent/guardian should contact the Food Service Director directly to discuss payment options such as an individualized repayment plan.

Payments

Parents/Guardians are responsible for all meal payments to the food service program. Notices of deficit balances will be sent directly to parent/guardians via email or via postal mail once balance reaches a \$20.00 deficit at regular intervals during the school year. At no time shall any staff member give payment notices to students unless that student is known to be an emancipated minor who is fully responsible for themselves or over the age of 18. If parent/guardians have concerns with student purchases they should contact the Food Services Director for assistance.

Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance. Further details are available on the school district webpage and in student handbooks. 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, will be carried over to the next school year. All negative balances MUST be brought into good standing prior to the last day of the academic school year.

All school cafeterias possess computerized point of sale systems that maintain records of all monies deposited and spent for each student and those records are available to parents by setting up an online account (see student handbooks for more details) or by speaking with the Food Service

Director. The point of sale system is designed to prevent overt identification of a student's meal status. Parents will receive automated negative-balance emails or mailed notices weekly, if applicable. If notices do not result in payment, parents will receive a phone call from Administration. If the phone call does not result in payment the Food Service Director shall turn the account over to the business office for further action.

Refunds

Refunds for withdrawn and/or graduating students require a written request (email, postal, or in person) for a refund of any money remaining in their account to be submitted, within 30 days of withdrawal/graduation. Graduating students also have the option to transfer funds to a sibling's account or to donate to a student in need with a written request.

Delinquent Accounts/Collections

Failure to maintain up to date accounts may result in a delay of a student's extra-curricular school services, especially those that are fee based. Graduating seniors may lose the ability to participate in certain graduation related activities.

The Superintendent shall ensure that there are appropriate and effective collection procedures and internal controls within the school district's business office that meet the requirements of law.

If a student is without meal money on a consistent basis, the administration may 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. Meal Applications are available year round. Each school handbook shall contain detailed instructions for parental assistance.

Policy Communications

This policy shall be communicated to all staff and families at the beginning of each school year and to families transferring to the district during the year.

LEGAL REFS: MGL [71:72](#); USDA School Meal Program Guidelines May 2017

CROSS REFS: [JQ](#), Student Fees, Fines & Charges

SOURCE: MASC February 2018

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