

Support Services

Section: EFD

MEAL CHARGE POLICY

The School Committee is committed to providing students with healthy, nutritious meals each day so they can focus on schoolwork, while also maintaining the financial integrity of 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 food services is a self-supporting entity within the district. The purpose of this policy is to ensure compliance with federal 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 all school meals under the USDA Child Nutrition Program. The School District will provide a breakfast or lunch to students who forget or lose their lunch money. The parent/guardian is responsible for any meal charges incurred.

Meal Charges and Balances

Students will pay for meals at the rate approved by the School Committee and for their meal status (paid, reduced-price, or free) each day. Payment options will be delineated on the District Website and provided to parents/guardians of incoming students. After the balance reaches zero and enters the negative, students, will not be allowed to purchase ala carte items including but not limited to a second entree, 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 meal charges incurred. If a student's meal status changes from paid to free or reduced, during the school year, any charges incurred prior to the status change are the responsibility of the parent/guardian. If there is a financial hardship, a parent/guardian should contact the food service department 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 low or deficit balances will be sent to parent/guardians at regular intervals during the school year. If notices do not result in payment, the district will contact the parents/guardians responsible for the payment. If parents/guardians have issues with student purchases they should contact the food service department for assistance.

Parents/Guardians may pay for meals in advance. Further details are available on the school district webpage. Funds should be maintained in accounts to minimize the possibility that a child may be without meal money on any given day. Any remaining balance for a particular student, whether positive or negative, will be carried over to the next school year.

All school cafeterias possess computerized point of sale/cash register systems that maintain records of all monies deposited and spent for each student and those records are available to parents/guardians by setting up an online account (see district website for more details) or by speaking with the school's food service department. The point of sale system is designed to prevent direct identification of a student's meal status. Parents/guardians are encouraged to set up automated low-balance email alerts through the online payment system.

Refunds

Positive balances of graduating students with a sibling in the district, will automatically transfer to the sibling's account. If there is no sibling in the district, the funds will be automatically mailed to the parents/guardians. Refunds of withdrawn students require a written request (email, postal, or in person) for a refund of any money within sixty days of withdrawal.

Delinquent Accounts/Collections

Failure of a parent or guardian to maintain reasonably current accounts may result in a referral to the Superintendent for their review. 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/guardians and families are encouraged to apply for free or reduced price lunches for their child. The District website shall contain detailed instructions for family 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: MOL 71:72; USDA School Meal Program Guidelines May 2017

CROSS REFS: JQ, Student Fees, Fines & Charges

SOURCE: MASC July 2018

Approved by the Hudson School Committee – December 4, 2018