

Student Food Service Meal Payment, Charging and Meal Account Management

I. Introduction

The School District believes that good nutrition is a central component for school success. As such, all students should have access to healthy meals during the school day. Parents have the option to provide their child with breakfast, snacks and/or lunch and are encouraged to have the food they send to school meet or exceed established federal nutrition guidelines. The School District participates in the federal school meals program which is also an option for students and families in order to provide their children with healthy meals during the school day. Each meal served by the School District is required to meet or exceed the federal nutrition guidelines.

This policy outlines the payment options available for students accessing the school meals program, management of student accounts, as well as the allowable practices for meal charging. This policy also provides guidelines on staff and administrator meal accounts as well as the district's food services debt management procedures.

II. Student Meal Account Management

A. Meal Payment Options

1. Full Price Payment. Payment for any meal is expected at the time of purchase. Payment can be made in cash, personal check or as a debit against funds deposited into an established online student meals account. The School District will provide parents with information on how to set up an online student meals account for their student's use.
2. Reduced or Free Meals Program. The District participates in the federally supported program to provide free or reduced price meals to students from families whose economic circumstances make paying for meals difficult. Income guidelines for eligibility are based on family size and are updated each year by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). At the beginning of each school year, the District will ensure that parents are informed of the eligibility requirements and application procedures for free and reduced meals. Parents can submit an application at any point during the school year when they believe they might be eligible for reduced meal pricing or free meals.

a. Reduced Price Meal Payment. Parents are encouraged to submit an application to the school district to determine whether or not their child is eligible to receive a reduced meal price. Parents can submit an application at any point during the school year when they believe they might be eligible for reduced meal pricing. Parents are encouraged to contact their child's school or the SAU office if they have questions about completing the application form.

Should a student qualify for a reduced price for purchased meals, payment is expected at the time of the meal is purchased. Payment can be made in cash, personal check or as a debit against funds deposited into an established online student meals account. The School District will provide parents with information on how to set up an online student meals account.

b. Free Meals. Parents are encouraged to submit an application to the school district to determine whether or not their child is eligible to receive free meals. Parents can submit an application at

Student Food Service Meal Payment, Charging and Meal Account Management

any point during the school year when they believe they might be eligible for free meals. Parents are encouraged to contact their child's school or the SAU office if they have questions about completing the application form.

The District will proactively accept students found to be categorically eligible to receive reduced price meals or free meals. The District will seek to make students eligible in a timely fashion, upon learning, from any source of the student's eligibility, including Direct Certification list. When eligibility is established, the District will apply the earliest effective date permitted by federal and state law. Any negative balances incurred up to that date remain the responsibility of the household. Eligibility is not retroactive.

B. Parental Restrictions for the Use of Student Meal Accounts

Parents who set up student meal accounts for their child are responsible for discussing with their children any restrictions for use of the student meal accounts. Parents will need to decide if they want to allow their children to use the account for all food options such as to purchase a la carte items or if they only want their children to purchase the regular meal. The food items that a student purchases with their student meal account will not be managed by the school district or the food services program. The District considers those decisions to be the parent's responsibility.

C. Meal Charging and Account Balance Management

As stated in Section 1 of this Policy, payment for meals is expected when the meal is purchased. It is the responsibility of parents to provide their child with funds to purchase meals. The District also recognizes that there may be times when a student has forgotten their lunch money or that the student's meal account has a zero balance. The District would like to work with families so that students can charge a meal on the occasion when this is necessary so that the child can eat lunch during the school day. At the same time, the District expects that parents will work with the school district in order to resolve any meal charges in a timely fashion.

1. Low Balance Notification - In order to prevent the need for students to have to charge a meal, the District's food service program will notify parents that they have a low balance when \$5 remains on the account. It is expected that parents will apply funds as soon as possible in order to keep a positive balance on their student's meal account.

2. Negative Balance Management – because the District believes that good nutrition is a central component for school success, students in grades K-12 will be allowed to occasionally charge a regular meal. No charging will be allowed for a la carte items at any time.

Because the district believes that communication with parents is critical to maintaining positive account balances for all students, the following management process will be instituted:

Student Food Service Meal Payment, Charging and Meal Account Management

Grades K-8

When a student account reaches a negative balance: The District's food service director will contact the parent the first time a student account reaches a negative balance.. This contact will be made through either an email or automated call to the parent.

When a student account reaches a negative balance of nine dollars (\$9): The District's food service director will contact the parent.. This contact will be made through either email or automated call to the parent to the parent. The food service director will contact the school administration to make them aware.

When a student account reaches a negative balance of fifteen dollars (\$15): The school administration will contact the parent.. This contact will be through a personal phone call to the parent.

When a student account reaches a negative balance of twenty five dollars (\$25): The school administration will contact the parent. This contact will be through a personal phone call to the parent. If the parent has not discussed the matter of made arrangements for payment with the school administration, school administration will notify the Superintendent or Designee.

When a student account reaches a negative balance of fifty dollars (\$50): The Food Service Director will contact the parent. This contact will be through personal phone call to the parent. The Food Service Director will contact the school administration and Superintendent or designee to make them aware. If the parent has not discussed the matter or made arrangements for payment with school administration, school administration will notify the Superintendent or Designee.

When a student account reaches a negative balance of seventy five dollars (\$75): The School Administration will contact the parent. This contact will be through personal phone call to the parent. If the parent has not discussed the matter or made arrangements for payment with school administration, school administration will notify the Superintendent or Designee. The Superintendent or designee will contact the parent and request a meeting.

The superintendent will determine what the most appropriate course of action will be should the parent refuse to cooperate with the school district to resolve negative account balances. That course of action could include, but not be limited to:

- Reporting the parent to the NH Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth and Families for child neglect;
- Contacting a collections agency in order to recover the outstanding debt;
- Withholding student participation in extra-curricular activities such as school clubs and school athletic programs and/or school events such as participation in the high school graduation ceremony.
- Other disciplinary action that the superintendent and school administration deem appropriate.

Student Food Service Meal Payment, Charging and Meal Account Management

Grades 9-12

When a student account reaches a negative balance: The District's food service director will contact the parent the first time a student account reaches a negative balance.. This contact will be made through either an email or automated call to the parent.

When a student account reaches a negative balance of nine dollars (\$9): The District's food service director will contact the parent.. This contact will be through either an email or automated call to the parent. The food service director will contact the school administration to make them aware.

When a student account reaches a negative balance of fifteen dollars (\$15): The school administration will contact the parent.. This contact will be through a personal phone call to the parent. The parent will be notified that once the account reaches the meal charge limit of \$25 no meal charging will be allowed until the parent has met with the Superintendent or Designee or the balance is paid in full. School Administration will notify the Superintendent or Designee.

When a student account reaches a negative balance of twenty five dollars (\$25): The school administration will contact the parent. This contact will be through a personal phone call to the parent. The parent will be notified that the meal charge limit of \$25 has been reached and no additional meal charging will be allowed until the balance is paid in full. School Administration will notify the Food Service Director and the Superintendent or Designee. No meal charging will be allowed for any student in grades 9-12 after the \$ \$25 meal charge limit has been reached if the parent has not met with the superintendent.

The superintendent will determine what the most appropriate course of action will be should the parent refuse to cooperate with the school district to resolve negative account balances. That course of action could include, but not be limited to:

- Reporting the parent to the NH Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth and Families for child neglect;
- Contacting a collections agency in order to recover the outstanding debt;

3. Positive Meal Account Balances – any student meal accounts with positive balances at the end of the school year will be automatically carried over to the next school year. Upon request of the parent who owns the account, any positive balance remaining at the end of the school year will be refunded. Students who have graduated or students who leave the school district during the school year will have account balances refunded to the owner or transferred to another student account at the request of the parent who owns the account. If the parent who owns the account does not request a refund by October 1st of the following school year, all unclaimed balances will be applied to the District's food service account and subsequently forwarded to the State of New Hampshire's Abandoned Property Division.

D. Communication with Parents

Student Food Service Meal Payment, Charging and Meal Account Management

As required by the USDA, a copy of this policy will be distributed to parents at the beginning of each school year. This information will also be available on the SAU website.

Parents are encouraged to contact their child's school, the food service director or the SAU office regarding questions on any aspect of this policy, including any questions about completing the eligibility form or managing their student's meal account.

III. Staff Meal Account Management

The School District provides the opportunity for staff to purchase meals from the food service program. Payment is expected when the meal is purchased. Staff may pay for meals with cash, personal check or as a debit against funds deposited into an established online meals account. It is the responsibility of the staff member to monitor their meal account balance.

At no time will staff be allowed to charge meal purchases.

If a staff member's meal account is in the positive at the end of the school year, it will be automatically carried over to the next school year. If requested, the balance will be refunded to the staff member.

IV. Administrator's Meal Accounts

Building administrators will have the authority and discretion to charge meals or food items for students on a case-by-case basis. Building administration must seek prior approval from the superintendent to charge meals or food items for guests, staff or others. Funds for these meals will be reimbursed from the administrator supplies budget line.

V. Food Service Debt Management

The federal program may not incur debt and the food service debt must be recovered annually. Any student debt at the end of each school year must be transferred from the food service account to the school's general fund, and at which time, will become debt belonging to the school district. At the end of each fiscal year, the District's general fund shall transfer to the food service account an amount equal to the total of outstanding student accounts receivable as of June 30th. The District will continue to attempt to collect the debt from various households and any payment received will be returned to the general fund.

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Legal References

- 15 U.S.C. § 1692-1695 federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act (FDCPA)*
- 42 U.S.C. 1758(b)(6), Use or disclosure of information*
- Civil Rights Act of 1964 & 7 C.F.R. Part 15, Subpart A & B*
- 2 C.F.R. §200.426*
- 7 C.F.R §210.09*
- 7 C.F.R §210.10*
- 7 C.F.R §210.15*
- 7 C.F.R. §245.5*
- USDA SP 46-2016 - No later than July 1, 2017, all SFA's operating the Federal school meal program are required to have a written meal charge policy.*
- USDA Guidance SP37-2016: Meaningful Access for Persons with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) in the School Meal Programs*
- RSA 189:11-a*
- RSA 358-C , New Hampshire's Unfair, Deceptive or Unreasonable Collection Practices Act;*
- NH Dept. of Education Technical Advisory - Food and Nutrition Program*

- Adopted:
- Reviewed: June 26, 2017
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