

MEAL CHARGE POLICY

On behalf of Natick Public Schools, we recognize that it is important to provide healthy and nutritious meals to all students. The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear and consistent approach to meal account procedures.

Methods of Payment

Natick Public Schools can accept payment for meals upon purchase in the form of cash at the register, by debit or credit card through the on-line payment system for school lunches, or by check sent to the Food Service Director. Any of these payment methods may be used to create a pre-payment of lunches to a student's account.

It is recommended that families and staff maintain on account a minimum balance equivalent to 5 school lunches for those who participate in the food service program. It is strongly encouraged that families and staff make on-line payments and register for alerts when balances are low.

Parents/Guardians are responsible for all meal payments to the food service program. Notices of low or deficit balances will be sent directly to parent/guardians via email or regular postal mail 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 issues with student purchases they should contact food services for assistance.

Policy Administration

It is within the scope of responsibility between the Business Office and the Food Service Management Company (FSMC) to monitor students' meal accounts with the goal of eliminating negative balances. Upon conclusion of the school year, any uncollected foodservice debt must be covered by the school operating budget.

Students with a zero balance on their account 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 meal charges incurred. If there is a financial hardship, a parent/guardian should contact food services directly to discuss payment options such as an individualized repayment plan.

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Refunds for withdrawn and/or graduating students require a written request (email, postal, or in person) for a refund of any money remaining in their account to be submitted. 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 of a parent or guardian to maintain reasonably current accounts may result in a referral to the Superintendent for his/her 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 and families are encouraged to apply for free or reduced price lunches for their child. 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

Approved by the Natick School Committee on