

MEAL CHARGE POLICY

The Jackson School District (“District”) encourages all parents and guardians (“parents”) to provide a healthy breakfast and lunch for their student(s). Parents are welcome to send students to school with a “brown bag/lunch box” meal. The District provides the opportunity to purchase regular school lunch from the school cafeteria. Each meal meets or exceeds federal nutrition standards. Payment is expected no later than when the meal is served. Payment may be in cash, check or as a debit against funds deposited into an established school lunch account. A fee of \$25.00 will be charged for each check returned for insufficient funds. In accordance with RSA 358-C:5 notice of the fee charged for a check that is returned for insufficient funds shall be included in any letter sent to a parent seeking payment because the student meal account has a negative balance.

Parental Restrictions on Use of Student Meal Accounts

Parents are responsible for establishing with their student any restrictions the parent chooses to place on the account. Unless restricted by the parent, a student may purchase a la carte items in addition to the regular meal choices. Students may purchase more than one meal at one sitting, as well as snacks. Parents must monitor the student’s use of the meal account to ensure that a sufficient balance is available at all times for the student to purchase meals.

The District’s policy is to ensure that all students have access to healthy meals and that no student will be subject to different treatment from the standard school meal or school cafeteria procedures. Therefore, the District allows students to purchase a meal, even if the student’s meal account has insufficient funds. This policy’s provisions pertain to regular school meals only. Federal policy prohibits the withholding of meals from a child as a form of discipline. The Superintendent shall develop regulations and procedures to support this policy.

Balance Statements

The District will work proactively with parents to maintain a positive balance in their student’s meal account. The Superintendent or designee shall establish a procedure at each school requiring that a notice be sent to parents whenever the balance in a student’s meal account falls into a negative balance.

The notice will be sent by email when practical, otherwise by a note in a sealed envelope with the student. Only those District staff who have received training on the confidentiality requirements of the federal and state law, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (“USDA) guidance for school meal programs, and who have a need to access a child’s account balance and eligibility information may communicate with parents regarding unpaid meal charges.

The District recognizes that unexpected financial hardships occur and will work with parents in this circumstance to limit the amount of accumulated debt.

Free or Reduced Price Meals

The District participates in the federally supported program to provide free or reduced priced meals to student 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 USDA. The District will ensure parents are informed of the eligibility requirements and the application procedures for free or reduced cost meals as well as the requirements of this policy.

Parents shall be provided with a copy of this policy and an application for free or reduced cost meals annually at the start of the school year, upon enrollment or transfer during the year. Information regarding free and/or reduced lunch applications as well as this policy will be a component of all notices sent to parents seeking payment to correct a negative balance in the student meal account. The policy and links to application materials for the free or reduced price meal program will be posted on the school website and made available to parents at each school.

As required by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and USDA guidelines, parents with Limited English Proficiency (“LEP”) will be provided with information on this policy and the free and reduced price meal program in a language the parents can understand.

Students Without Cash in Hand or a Positive Account Balance

Regardless of whether a student has money to pay for a meal or a negative balance in the student meal account, a student requesting a meal shall be provided with a meal from among the choices available to all students. The only exception will be where the student’s parents have provided the District with specific written direction that the student not be provided with a school lunch program meal, the student has a meal from home or otherwise has access to an appropriate meal. It is the parents’ responsibility to provide their student with a meal from home or to pay for school prepared meals.

If a student with a negative balance in his or her meal account seeks to purchase a meal with cash or check, the student will be allowed to do so. There is no requirement that the funds be applied first to the debt.

Initial efforts to contact parents will be by e-mail or phone, however if those efforts are unsuccessful, letters to parents may be sent home in sealed envelopes with the student. Should the student’s meal account balance fall below zero, a balance statement requesting immediate payment shall be sent to parents no less than once each week.

If the student’s meal account balance debt grows to \$25.00 or more, a letter requesting immediate payment shall be sent by US mail to the parent, or the parent shall be contacted by the Food Service Director or Principal/designee by phone or in person. Where warranted, the Principal may arrange a payment schedule to address current meal consumption and arrearages while the school continues to provide the student with meals.

If the student's meal account debt grows to \$50.00 or more parents will be requested to meet with the school Principal or designee. When appropriate, the Principal or designee should explore with the parents whether an application for free or reduced cost meals is warranted. Where extenuating circumstances of financial hardship exist and the family is not eligible for free or reduced cost meals, the District will work with the parents to identify and engage governmental and charitable resources that are available to assist the family.

If the Principal determines that the best available information is that the parents are able to pay for the expenses of the student's meals and the parents decline to cooperate with resolving the debt in a timely manner, the Principal shall send a letter to the parents directing them to have their student bring meals from home and cease using the school meal program. The student may resume using the school meal program when a positive account balance is restored. If the student continues to use the school meal program without a positive balance, a second letter shall be sent to the parents using certified mail.

If the parent refuses to provide payment to address the negative balance in a student's lunch account, the Superintendent or designee may pursue payment through civil legal action, including filing a claim in small claims court pursuant to RSA Chapter 503. The Superintendent is delegated authority to assess the likelihood that claim action will lead to payment, the resources required to pursue collection, and to pursue such action only when doing so is in the best interest of the District. If a student who has been determined to be ineligible for free or reduced cost meals or whose parents have refused to complete an application for free or reduced cost meals is consistently not provided with meals either through a meal sent from home or the payment for a meal through the school meal program, the Principal will assess whether a report of child neglect is warranted to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth, & Families, as required by RSA 169-C:29-31

If at the end of the fiscal year uncollected debt in student meal accounts must, as a last resort to fulfill federal requirements, be paid to the school meal program from other District funds, the parents' debt for unpaid meal charged shall be owed to the District. Any payments collected on debt that has been offset with District funds shall be credited to the District. All debt collection efforts shall comply with RSA Chapter 358-C, New Hampshire's Unfair, Deceptive or Unreasonable Collection Practices Act.

Staff Enforcement of Policy/Training

A copy of this policy and refresher training shall be provided annually to all food service and school staff responsible for serving student meals or enforcing this policy. New staff with those responsibilities shall be provided with a written copy of the policy and training on the policy during their initial training/orientation. In accordance with federal requirements, all trainings shall be documented.

Students with Special Dietary Needs

Nothing in this policy prohibits providing an appropriate meal to a student with special dietary needs such as, but not limited to, diabetes, provided those needs have been documented in a health plan, Sec 504, or IEP. If the meal is medically required, and the student has a negative

student meal balance, or does not have cash to purchase the meal, the necessary dietary needs will be met.

Nondiscrimination

It is the District's policy that in the operation of child feeding programs, no child will be discriminated against because of race, sex, color, national origin, age, or disability. 7C.F.R. 245.5(a)(1)(viii).

Adopted by Jackson School Board – September 17, 2012
Revision Adopted on April 17, 2021

OVERDUE LUNCH ACCOUNT PROCEDURES

1. The food service department will send out weekly reminders to parents regarding students who have a negative balance on their lunch accounts via email, phone call or note home with the student in a sealed envelope.
2. The food service director will communicate with building principals on a monthly basis. If a student's account reaches a negative balance of \$25.00, the Food Service Director or Principal will call the parent, documenting the dates and times of the call, or send a letter using U.S. Mail. The principal may work with the parent to establish a payment plan if appropriate.
3. If the account exceeds a \$50.00 balance, the principal or designee will request a meeting with the parent. When appropriate, the Principal or designee should explore with the parents whether an application for free or reduced cost meals is warranted. Where extenuating circumstances of financial hardship exist and the family is not eligible for free or reduced cost meals, the District will work with the parents to identify and engage governmental and charitable resources that are available to assist the family.
4. If the Principal determines that the best available information is that the parents are able to pay for the expenses of the student's meals and the parents decline to cooperate with resolving the debt in a timely manner, the Principal shall mail a letter to the parents directing them to have their student bring meals from home and cease using the school meal program. The student may resume using the school meal program when a positive account balance is restored. If the student continues to use the school meal program without a positive balance, a second letter shall be sent to the parents using certified mail.
5. If the parent refuses to provide payment to address the negative balance in a student's lunch account, the Superintendent or designee may pursue payment through civil legal action, including filing a claim in small claims court pursuant to RSA Chapter 503. If a student who has been determined to be ineligible for free or reduced cost meals or whose parents have refused to complete an application for free or reduced cost meals is consistently not provided with meals either through a meal sent from home or the payment for a meal through the school meal program, the Principal will assess whether a report of child neglect is warranted to the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division for Children, Youth, & Families.