

## SCHOOL MEAL CHARGES

The Quabbin Regional School District School Committee recognizes that healthy, nutritious meals are an important component to student readiness and ability to learn. Quabbin Regional School District shall provide nutritious and well-balanced meals in its school meal program. By statute, the district's Food and Nutritional Services department is a self-supporting fund that shall not have a negative balance at the close of a fiscal year. Unpaid charges place a financial strain on the Food and Nutritional Services department and on the district's operating budget. To be fair and equitable and in order to ensure compliance of all who participate in the school meal program, the policy establishes procedures for methods of payment, charge availability and collection methods.

The Quabbin Regional School Committee establishes the following goals:

- To establish a consistent district policy regarding the method of payment for meals, charge availability and collection methods for charges in the district's meal program.
- To treat all students with dignity at all times.
- To waive all cost for students who are eligible and approved for free school meals after completing the Massachusetts Free and Reduced Price School Meals Household Application or qualifying through the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Health and Human Services, Virtual Gateway.
- To reduce cost for students who are eligible and approved for reduced priced meals after completing the Massachusetts Free and Reduced Price School Meals Household Application.
- To support positive interactions with students, parent(s)/guardian(s), and district staff to the maximum extent possible.
- To encourage the parent(s)/guardian(s) to assume the responsibility of payments and to promote self-responsibility of the student.

### KEY TERMS

*A la carte Items:* Any single component of a meal, a snack, bottled water, bottled juice or milk priced individually, not as part of a reimbursable meal. A la carte items do not qualify for free or reduced price and must be paid for at time of sale with cash or pre-paid funds on account.

*Charge:* Purchasing a reimbursable meal without making payment at time of purchase with cash or pre-paid funds on account.

*Credit Limit:* The dollar limit to which students may charge school meals, based on the student's eligibility status. Paying students: \$15.00; Reduced price students: \$4.00; Free students: not eligible to charge.

*Free Meal:* A reimbursable meal served to a student certified as eligible for such benefits.

*Good Standing:* A school meals account with a zero or positive balance.

*Non-Reimbursable Meal:* Non-reimbursable meals cost full price. Non-reimbursable meals are not part of the USDA program and do not qualify for free or reduced price and must be paid for at time of sale with cash or pre-paid funds on account. A meal not consisting of at least three (3) of the five (5) offered meal components (grain, meat or meat alternative, fruit, vegetable and milk) or not including a fruit and/or vegetable component is considered a non-reimbursable meal.

*Parent/Guardian Account:* A free account on *mySchoolBucks.com*, an online program for parents/guardians that works in conjunction with their student's school meal account. By accessing their student's account, parents/guardians can view their student's purchases and account balance at any time, setup balance notifications to be automatically sent by email or make payment or pre-payment on their account by credit card or e-check (an automatic deposit from a bank account).

*Payment:* Cash or check paid daily for school meals or a la carte items or with pre-paid funds on account.

*Pre-payment:* Funds on account. Pre-payment is accepted in the form of cash or check at any register or through the district's online payment center, *mySchoolBucks.com*, using a credit card or e-check.

*Reduced Price Meal:* A reimbursable lunch priced at 40 cents or less, or a reimbursable breakfast priced at 30 cents or less, served to a student certified as eligible for such benefits.

*Reimbursable Meal:* To qualify as a reimbursable meal, the meal must include a fruit and/or vegetable component. A meal consisting of at least three (3) of the five (5) offered meal components (grain, meat or meat alternative, fruit, vegetable and milk), at least one of which is a fruit or vegetable.

*School Meal Account:* An account assigned to every student in the district whether or not they participate in the school meals program. Students participating in the school meals program access their account using a unique, 4-digit Personal Identification Number (PIN) on PIN pads located at every register. School meal accounts maintain data required to be reported to federal and state agencies. Information pertaining to a student's eligibility status is securely contained within the account to assure confidentiality

*Second Meals:* An additional meal consisting of one (1) or more components of the offered meal sold on an a la carte basis. Second meals are not part of the USDA program and do not qualify for free or reduced price and must be paid at full price at time of sale with cash or pre-paid funds on account.

## METHOD OF PAYMENT

The Quabbin Regional School District will accept pre-payment of school meals in the form of cash or check at the register or via the school meal online payment center. Cash for a daily meal will also be accepted at the register.

## ADMINISTRATION OF POLICY

The district administration is responsible for ensuring that the Food and Nutritional Services accounts are properly managed and accurately reported. The administration will closely monitor student school meal accounts with the goal of eliminating negative balances and delinquent accounts.

Parent(s)/guardian(s) will strongly be encouraged to register for a free account on the school meal online payment center, mySchoolBucks.com, which gives access to parents/guardians to:

- View student transaction history
- Request e-mail alerts to low balances
- Make payments and pre-payments to a student's account
- Schedule payments to add funds to a student's account
- Set up automatic deposits to a student's account

The district administration will provide at least annual notice of how to access the online payment center. There will be a minimal fee for using the online payment center. This fee does not benefit the Quabbin Regional School District.

## STUDENT ACCOUNTS

Any student whose school meal account has a zero or negative balance will be allowed to charge a reimbursable meal. Charging a reimbursable meal will result in a negative balance on the student's account until funds are added to the student's account.

Under no circumstances will a student with a zero or negative account balance be allowed to purchase a second meal or a la carte items until the student's account is in good standing.

### For Students with Free School Meals Status

- The federal school lunch program allows an eligible student to receive a one free school lunch and breakfast, where available, every day.
- Students are required to take a reimbursable meal.
- If a student does not take a reimbursable meal, the meal does not qualify for free status and full price must be paid for with cash or pre-paid funds on account at the time of sale. If the student does not have cash or pre-paid funds on account, the meal will be charged at full price to the student's account.
- Second meals and items sold on an a la carte basis are not part of the USDA program and must be paid at time of sale with cash or pre-paid funds on account. A la carte items cannot be charged.

- Students with free school meals status will not be allowed to have a negative account balance for more than one school day.

#### For Students with Reduced Price School Meals Status

- The federal school lunch program allows an eligible student to receive a one reimbursable school lunch at the reduced price of \$0.40 and one reimbursable school breakfast, where available, at the reduced price of \$0.30.
- Students are required to take a reimbursable meal.
- If a student does not take a reimbursable meal, the meal does not qualify for reduced price status and full price must be paid for with cash or pre-paid funds on account at the time of sale. If the student does not have cash or pre-paid funds on account, the meal will be charged at full price to the student's account.
- Second meals and items sold on an a la carte basis are not part of the USDA program and must be paid at time of sale with cash or pre-paid funds on account. A la carte items cannot be charged.
- Students with reduced price meals status will be allowed to charge meals up to \$4.00 before the collection process begins.

#### For Students with Paid School Meals Status

- Prices for school meals are set by the Quabbin Regional School District School Committee within parameters of federal and state regulations.
- Second meals and a la carte items cannot be charged but may be purchased with cash or pre-paid funds on account.
- Students with paid school meals status may charge meals up to \$15.00 before the collection process begins.

The Quabbin Regional School District will deny access to second meals for any student who does not have cash or pre-paid funds on account at time of sale.

#### Refunds

- For any student who has withdrawn, a request for a refund of any funds remaining in the student's account must be submitted in writing.
- For students who are graduating, a refund may be issued with a written request or funds may be transferred to a sibling's account with a written request.
- After six (6) months, unclaimed funds will become the property of the Quabbin Regional School District, Food and Nutritional Services department.

#### Remaining Balances

Any positive balance may:

- Remain on account to be used in the following school year,
- Be transferred to a sibling's account, or
- Be refunded to the parent(s)/guardian(s) with written request.

## MANAGEMENT SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY

- a.) Food & Nutritional Services Manager and site designees – Responsible for maintaining records of charges and for notifying the student's parent(s)/guardian(s) of low and/or negative account balances. The Food and Nutritional Services Manager is responsible for notifying the Director of Administrative Services of negative account balances in a timely manner.
- b.) Director of Administrative Services, as the district's designee – Responsible for supporting and assisting the Food and Nutritional Services Manager and site designees in the collection process.
- c.) Parent(s)/Guardian(s): Immediate correspondence and full payment of outstanding or delinquent balance.

On a weekly basis, site designees will prepare negative balance letters for all accounts with a charge balance greater than \$5.00 to be signed by the Principal and sent home with an elementary student or mailed for middle and high school students.

When the charge amount exceeds the amounts set above, the Director of Food and Nutritional Services or designee:

- Will prepare a letter or e-mail to be sent to the parent(s)/guardian(s) requesting immediate payment.
- Will, if applicable, assist the family in applying for free or reduced price school meals.
- Will notify the Director of Administrative Services in writing.

The administration will take the following action(s), if there are no mitigating factors and the parent(s)/guardian(s) has not made any payments in an effort to reduce the negative balance or fails to bring the student's account in good standing (having a zero or positive balance) within ten (10) days:

- Refer the account to a collection agency.
- Initiate a claim in the court system.
- Notify other appropriate state agencies.

If a student's account balance exceeds -\$25.00, the administration may take the following action:

- Prohibit participation by the student in any future fee-based program (field trips, user-fee based programs, etc.) until or unless the deficit balance is paid in full.

If a student's account is not in good standing at the end of the trimester or school year, the administration may take one or more of the following actions, unless or until prohibited by state law or regulation:

- Prohibit the student's participation or other students in the student's household from participating in any future fee or charge-based program until or unless the negative or delinquent balance is paid in full.

- Refer the account to a collection agency.
- Initiate a claim in the court system and/or contact the MA District Attorney's office.
- Notify other appropriate state agencies.

If a senior's account is not in good standing as of May 1<sup>st</sup>, the administration may take the following action:

- Prohibit student from participation in senior activities and/or graduation exercises.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

### Checks Returned for Non-Sufficient Funds (NSF):

When a check is returned to the District Treasurer's Office for Non-Sufficient Funds (NSF), a letter will be mailed from the Food and Nutritional Services' office or District Administration's office to inform the issuer. Payment for the NSF check must be in the form of cash, cashier's check, or money order. Payment must be received within ten (10) days of the date of the letter. Any bank fee imposed upon the district will be reimbursed to the district by the issuer.

If payment of an NSF check is not received within the ten (10) days of the date of the letter, a second request will follow the procedure set forth in M.G.L. Chapter 93 § 40A. In addition to the procedure set forth in M.G.L. Chapter 93 §40A, the Superintendent or his/her designee may take one or more of the following actions:

- Delay the issuance of report cards, transfer cards, and class assignments until or unless the negative or delinquent balance is paid in full.
- Prohibit the student's participation or other students in the student's household from participating in any future fee or charge-based program until or unless the negative or delinquent balance is paid in full.
- Prohibit student from participation in senior activities and/or graduation exercises.
- Refer the account to a collection agency.
- Initiate a claim in the court system and/or contact the MA District Attorney's office.
- Notify other appropriate state agencies.

Legal Reference: 7 CFR 210, Office of Management and Budget Circular A-87

M.G.L. Chapter 71: Section 72. Sale of lunches

M.G.L. Chapter 71: Section 68. Duties of towns to maintain schools; transportation of children; school building committee representation

M.G.L. Chapter 71: Section 37K. Business demonstration projects; disposition of proceeds

M.G.L. Chapter 44: Section 69. Municipal or district services, fees or charges; insufficient funds checks; penalty

M.G.L. Chapter 60: Section 57A. Payment by check not duly paid; penalty

M.G.L. Chapter 93: Section 40A. Dishonored checks; demand for payment

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