

## **Meal Charge Policy**

The North Middlesex Regional School District School Committee recognizes that a healthy, nutritious meal plays an important role in the readiness and ability of students to learn. The purpose of this policy is to establish consistency regarding meal account procedures while ensuring that all students are treated with dignity.

Although the school food program is managed by an outside company, any debt associated with this program is owed to the school district. Deficits in the program must be covered by the general school budget.

### Methods of Payment

The North Middlesex Regional School District can accept payment for meals upon purchase in the form of cash or check at the register, or via the school meal on-line payment system. Meals may be prepaid using any of these methods. Parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to make payments on-line and to register for low balance alerts.

A minimum balance equivalent to five (5) school meals is recommended for those who participate in the food service program.

A parent/guardian may request that any of the following restrictions may be placed on their student's account:

1. No a la carte purchases.
2. No negative charges allowed.
3. An established monetary limit of a la carte purchases by meal.

### Administration of Policy

The school district is responsible for ensuring that all accounts, including the food service revolving account, are properly managed and accurately reported. The school district works closely with the Food Service Management Company to monitor students' meal accounts with the goal of eliminating negative balances. Parents/guardians who have signed up on-line for low balance alerts are notified when the account is running low and needs to be replenished. The purchase of an a la carte item may not result in a negative balance. All cash purchases will be honored.

### Account Management

On a weekly basis, the Food Service Director will generate a charge balance report from the Point of Sale (POS) system. The Director will flag all accounts that are nearing a zero balance or have gone into the negative. A student list, sorted by school, will be sent to the principals.

After a student account reaches a negative balance, the principal, assistant principal, or guidance counselor will attempt to contact the parent/guardian by phone, email, or a letter sent home. The purpose of the contact is to inform the parent/ guardian of the negative balance and to offer assistance if needed. The principal, assistant principal, or guidance counselor may offer to help fill out a free/reduced lunch application, refer the parent/guardian to the business office for a payment plan, or provide other assistance as deemed appropriate. The principal, assistant principal, or guidance counselor shall follow up on any unresolved accounts.

Should the parent/guardian not be responsive to the contact and continues to fail to bring the account back into good standing within 1 month (or before May 1st in the year of graduation), the principal may remove the student from participation in the food service program. Once removed from the program, if the student is not being provided lunch from home, the principal will notify the superintendent and may call in appropriate state agencies.

If the balance exceeds twenty-five (\$25.00), the following action may be taken (unless prohibited by state law or regulation):

- Prohibited participation of the student in any future fee-based program (field trips, user-fee based programs, etc.) until or unless outstanding balances are resolved.
- The account may be referred to an outside collection agency.

For students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, accounts will be processed in accordance with federal regulations.

A positive balance will remain on account to be used in the following school year unless the account holder requests that the positive balance be moved to a sibling's account or returned to account holder.

When the student leaves the district, the business office will notify the account holder of their end-of-year balance and all reasonable efforts will be made by the district to return the money to the account holder.

**Please Note:** Middle and High School students with a negative balance cannot borrow for or purchase ala carte items until the account balance is brought to positive.

LEGAL REFS: Child Nutrition Action of 1966