

UNPAID MEAL CHARGE POLICY

The Reading Public School System participates in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Program sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) which permits the school system to offer free and reduced priced meals to students who qualify. Families who wish to apply for free or reduced meals must complete an application each year. The application may be submitted at any time during the school year. Applications are available in each school's main office, at the School Nutrition office, and online at <https://www.reading.k12.ma.us/>.

BORROWING MONEY FOR A MEAL

Any student whose school meal account has a zero or negative balance **will be allowed to charge a reimbursable meal and/or a milk**. A "reimbursable meal" is defined as a meal consisting of at least three (3) of the five (5) offered meal components (grain, meat or meat alternative, fruit, vegetable and milk) and must include a fruit and/or vegetable component. This will result in a negative balance on the student's account until funds are added to the student's account.

Per the USDA, we are legally obligated to collect any owed funds from a served reimbursable meal, but we are not legally obligated to serve a reimbursable meal that is not paid for. However, we must consider our customers and use the utmost courtesy while managing this process. It is important to the Reading School Nutrition Department that we have open communication between the student, the parent, the Director of School Nutrition, and the Principal of each school to manage any student debt incurred for meals

Families will be notified weekly by the School Nutrition program if their account is negative. The School Nutrition Department will work together with the school administration in a joint effort to contact students/parents to assist with collections.

Students with a negative account balance will not be allowed to purchase a la carte items until the student's account is in good standing. "Good standing" for the purchase of a la carte items are defined as an account with a positive balance.

PAYMENT OPTIONS

The Reading School Nutrition Department offers an online payment option as well as a payment by check or cash. Our online website is www.myschoolbucks.com. We encourage our families to pre-pay for meals at the paid or reduced price to help to ensure children have consistent access to meals without accruing unpaid meal charges. Our system includes a feature to allow for parental restrictions limiting a child's spending at the point of service. For example, the system could allow families to place specific limits on à la carte purchases. Families can contact the School Nutrition office for further information should they wish to utilize this option. We also accept checks and cash at all schools. Checks should be made out to the Reading School Nutrition Department.

ONLINE PAYMENT

We allow families to add money to their child's account from a computer or mobile device which makes payment more convenient for families. Families who do not opt to pay using the online system can access the system to check their child's account balance. Many families may not realize how much their child is spending in the cafeteria each day, especially if the child is purchasing à la carte items in addition to their reimbursable breakfast and lunch. We encourage families to regularly check their account balance and track their child's spending. This can help prevent households from accruing unpaid meal charges.

AUTOMATIC PAYMENT

We also offer online payment platforms that include an optional feature which families may use to automatically add money to their account when they reach a set dollar amount. Families using these systems may also set up a “low balance warning” to ensure they are notified promptly when a payment is needed.

The Reading Public Schools will work together with all the fee-based programs and activities. At the end of each school year students with an outstanding bill above (\$20.00) will not be allowed to register for any fee-based program until the food balance has been paid off.

REFUNDS

Withdrawn Students: For any student who is withdrawn, a written request for a refund of any money remaining in their account must be submitted. An e-mail request is also acceptable.

Graduating Students: Students who are graduating at the end of the year who have a negative balance will not be eligible to participate in graduation activities. Students who have a positive balance may transfer the balance to a sibling’s account, donate the money to a student who has an outstanding debt, or request a refund.

DONATIONS TOWARD STUDENT DEBT

When donations toward student debt are received, they need to be applied to a specific student’s debt. A general donation goes into the School Nutrition program account but does not get applied to a specific student(s), so the debt owed does not decrease. The student(s)' files will continue to show the same debt unless the donation is applied to specific student(s)'s accounts.

If a donation is made to a specific school, the principal will work with the Director of School Nutrition to determine which student(s) will be credited and by how much. (A donation may be split between multiple students.) The director or principal may use the process outlined below for the district to determine who in their building will receive the donation, or they may decide based on their knowledge of the students and their families.

If a donation is made to the district in general, and not to a specific school, then the Director of School Nutrition will follow these guidelines in applying the donation to specific students:

1. The donation will be prorated/split between students who are currently eligible for free lunch and who have debt from prior to their eligibility for free lunch.
2. If monies remain from any donation after all students eligible in #1 are covered, the same proration/split will be done between students currently eligible for reduced lunch and who have debt from prior to their eligibility for reduced lunch.
3. If monies remain from any donation after all students eligible in #1 and #2 are covered, the balance will be prorated/split over students currently receiving reduced lunch who have debt from the paid portion of the reduced lunch price.

4. If monies remain after all these students are covered, the balance will be held for 60 days and then applied using this same process to any new debt.
5. The School Nutrition Dept will notify families when monies are applied to their account, letting them know there was an anonymous donation toward their debt.

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

Adopted by the Reading School Committee 11.01.18