

Putting the “Free” Back in a “Free Public Education” Promise
Federal Hocking Local School District
How we do it

Introduction

At Federal Hocking Local Schools we have worked hard to offer as many services possible to our children and families free of charge. This includes free breakfast and lunch for all students (and free milk for kids that pack their lunches), no fees for classrooms or extracurricular activities, and free admission to school events such as athletic contests. We are often asked how we do this and, in response to that question, we have put together this information sheet. If you would like more information please feel free to contact Superintendent of Schools George Wood through his assistant Lavonna Laughlin at lLaughlin@fhlanders.com or 740-662-2141.

Free Breakfast and Lunch (and milk)

Federal Hocking is eligible for the Obama era Community Enrollment Plan (CEP) for our food service. With CEP if 40% or more of a district’s students are Direct Certified (DC) for free meals the district may apply to have all meals free. Children qualify for DC under a number of programs, including foster care, eligibility for food stamps, and other needs based programs. Federal Hocking meets the criteria.

However, this does not mean we are reimbursed for every meal as a free meal. Rather, a formula is used for federal/state reimbursement and then the district must figure out whether or not they can afford the program. In our case we felt the cost was worth the benefit. (It should be noted that adults such as teachers, administrators, etc. do pay the full price for breakfast and lunch if they eat.)

Shortly into the free meal program several parents asked if their children who packed or brought lunch with them could get free milk. One parent suggested his child would take the entire meal, throw it away, and just drink the milk. The school board determined that would be in the best interests of children if we provided this. Cafeterias keep track of the number of milks provided to students who pack and we pay for this out of the district’s general fund at the end of the year.

No Fees

At one time the District did have academic fees for all grades. When the district was in financial trouble we were also required by state regulators to charge students for playing on athletic teams or in the band. We no longer do this as we believe it discriminates against families already struggling to make ends meet.

What we found with fees is that they were simply not worth the bother or embarrassment. Principals and secretaries spent untold hours with book keeping and tracking down students who had not paid. Families would face the humiliation of saying they could not pay or would come each month with a small payment hoping their child could continue to participate.

In lieu of the fees we no longer collect our programs simply make due with the funds they are budgeted and rely on the work of our booster groups to take up the slack. PTOs at our buildings raise funds through carnivals and other activities to support classrooms. Our Athletic and Band Boosters provide support to those programs. Our goal is to make sure all students participate in any and all activities both in the classroom and in extracurricular activities regardless of their family situation.

Free Athletic Events

At the suggestion of our athletic department we no longer charge admission to students for athletic events. One generous employee donated part of his salary to begin this program, and now we support it through a Board created athletic fund.

In Summary

Certainly the effort to keep our schools and classrooms 'free' for all children creates challenges in stretching our budget. But it has been the commitment of the Federal Hocking School Board and Staff that has made this work.

Public schools are the backbone of our democratic society. In them we help our children gain the intellectual and social skills that makes self-governance possible. To that end we want to ensure that every student participates fully in every school experience, and we do that by making our school programs free to all comers. Our goal is to continue a truly 'free' public education into the foreseeable future because it is the right thing to do for our children, our community, and our democracy.