



**SB579 – PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION – BREAKFAST AND LUNCH PROGRAM –
UNIVERSAL EXPANSION**

February 14, 2024
BUDGET AND TAXATION

SUPPORT

Grace Wilson, Legislative & Policy Specialist (410.440.1758)

Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) supports **SB579**. This bill requires beginning in fiscal year 2026 if a school participates in the federal school breakfast program by providing a free or reduced-price breakfast to a student, each student in the school shall be offered a free breakfast that meets the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) nutrition standards under the federal school breakfast program. Additionally, beginning in fiscal year 2026, if a school participates in the national school lunch program by providing a free or reduced-price lunch to a student, each student in the school shall be offered a free lunch that meets the USDA nutrition standards under the national school lunch program. The State is responsible for reimbursing a county board or a participating nonpublic school for the costs of offering each student a free breakfast or a free lunch.

Furthermore, the bill prohibits a county board or nonpublic school from charging a student any portion of the cost of a breakfast that meets the nutritional standards of the federal school breakfast program or a lunch that meets the nutritional standards of the national school lunch program beginning in fiscal year 2026. Finally, clarifying that the intent of the General Assembly that each county board and participating nonpublic schools maximize the use of all available federal funds in carrying out the requirements of the program.

AACPS recognizes the importance of developing a healthy school environment which promotes student health, well-being, and the ability to learn. Healthy school environments meet nutrition standards and guidelines for food and beverages available on school campus in accordance with State and federal laws and regulations which promote food comprised of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein. Free and nutritious meals for all students allow them to stay fueled, ready to learn, and out of the school nurse's office.

During the 2021-2022 school year, AACPS offered free school meals to all students and served 41,000 school lunches a day. During the 2022-2023 school year, free school meals were no longer available to all students, and AACPS is served 32,000 school lunches a day. Students who ate with us during the 2021-2022 school year did not choose to do so during the 2022-2023 school year. This bill would allow approximately 9,000 students to eat school meals again, free of charge, thus enabling them to better learn and succeed.

AACPS supports this bill that would provide free school meals to all students and ensures that all AACPS students are fueled and best prepared to engage in educational experiences. Accordingly, AACPS respectfully requests a **FAVORABLE** committee report on SB579.