



HB 857 - Favorable
Education - Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program - School Lunch
House Ways and Means Committee

The Maryland Out of School Time Network founded The Maryland Coalition for Community Schools (MD4CS) in 2016 to advocate for student and family success by leading the charge to expand the Community School Model in Maryland. MD4CS enthusiastically supports HB 857 which will require community schools that receive per-pupil grant funding from the Concentration of Poverty Grant Program to provide school meals to all children at no cost to them or their families. This bill will also provide state funding to continue providing school meals at no cost to all students in Maryland during the 2022-2023 school year in the event that federal pandemic-related waivers are not extended.

HB 857 complements the existing Blueprint Bill funding mechanisms. The Concentration of Poverty Grant Program already identifies the state's most underserved and underfunded schools. Tying funding for meals to community schools is an effective and efficient way to ensure that our state's most needy students and families receive support.

This bill also supports the overall community school strategy - which has been identified by both the federal and state government as an effective tool to reduce poverty and improve student outcomes. Community schools employ a community school coordinator to identify school assets and gaps in support, form strong partnerships with surrounding organizations, and integrate supports and services into the school. Comprehensively addressing food access for students and families means Blueprint funding can focus on targeted academic and social supports.

HB 857 also allocates some of Maryland's budget surplus to providing school meals at no charge to any student across the state for one school year in the event that federal pandemic-related waivers are not extended past June 2022. Continuing to fund healthy school meals for all across the state through the 2022-2023 school year will have a major impact on our students, families, and school systems.

MD4CS represents community school stakeholders and supporters from across the state of Maryland. Community school coordinators and practitioners have been first responders to students, families, and the school system since the pandemic began. They have played a critical role in supplying and distributing food and academic supplies over the past two years. Anyone in the community school strategy will tell you - Hungry students cannot be engaged and ready to learn. Providing state funding for school meals helps students make the most out of school time and alleviates a lot of stress and cost for families.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that every child in Maryland receives the healthy food they need to stay hunger-free and ready to learn; therefore we urge a favorable report for HB857