

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Testimony to the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee in Support of Senate Bill 557: Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

February 22, 2023

The Baltimore City Public School System (City Schools) supports Senate Bill 557, which seeks to significantly increase the availability of free breakfast and lunch for students statewide. As a longtime provider of universal meals, City Schools has seen firsthand the positive impact of ensuring students have the nutrition they need to learn throughout the day.

Prior to 2015, City Schools relied on the collection of meal application forms in order for students to receive free meals. Since 2015, however, all City Schools students have been able to eat free breakfast and lunch through USDA’s Community Eligibility Program (CEP). In the year after the district implemented universal free meals, lunch participation increased by 10,000 meals per day. At present, City Schools has an enrollment of more than 75,000 students and, on a daily basis, serves approximately 86,000 meals.

Baltimore City represents one of the state’s four CEP districts. In a study of CEP implementation, researchers at the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health compared like schools in Baltimore City and Montgomery County and found that the odds of being in a food insecure household were twice as likely for students attending CEP-eligible, but not participating schools (in Montgomery County) than for students attending CEP schools (in Baltimore City).ⁱ While the research yielded clear reasons why students ought to have access to free meals in the school settingⁱⁱ, at the most basic level, food is as essential as textbooks in supporting student learning.

Given the inextricable ties between eating habits, healthy behaviors and overall student wellness, City Schools respectfully urges a favorable committee report for Senate Bill 557.

ⁱ Full paper: [Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition](#)

ⁱⁱ [School-Meals-are-Essential-Health-and-Learning.pdf \(frac.org\)](#)

“Students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance, behavior, academic performance, and academic achievement as well as decreased tardiness...”

JAMA: Liu et al. (2021); Trends in Food Sources and Diet Quality Among US Children and Adults, 2003-2018

Diet quality for foods from schools improved significantly, especially after 2010, and equitably across subgroups; by 2017-2018, food consumed at schools had the highest quality, followed by food from grocery stores, other sources, worksites, and restaurants.

[Impact of The Community Eligibility Provision of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act on Student Nutrition, Behavior, and Academic Outcomes: 2011–2019 | AJPH | Vol. 110 Issue 9 \(aphapublications.org\)](#)

“There is strong evidence of benefits of UFM for meal participation rates; promising evidence for benefits for weight outcomes, food security, disciplinary referrals, and on-time grade promotion; and mixed evidence of impacts for test scores and attendance.”