



PSSAM
Public School Superintendents' Association
OF MARYLAND

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BILL: HB 628

TITLE: Primary and Secondary Education – Breakfast and Lunch Programs – Universal Expansion

DATE: February 22, 2023

POSITION: Support

COMMITTEE: House Ways and Means Committee

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The Public School Superintendents' Association of Maryland (PSSAM), on behalf of all twenty-four public school superintendents, **supports** House Bill 628.

House Bill 628 is intended to reimburse local boards of education for the cost of providing free breakfast and lunch to all students attending public and participating private schools under the State's Free Feeding Program.

PSSAM strongly supports this legislation and the State's generous participation. Based on our experiences during Covid in feeding students and families, we are extremely confident that all twenty-four local school systems will be able to implement such an ambitious program effectively and efficiently.

The research on free meals for all students is vast and universally confirms the positive impact on student achievement, including academics and behavior. According to Madelein Levin and Jessie Hewins, the authors of *Universal Free School Meals: Ensuring That All Children are Able to Learn*, their findings include increased participation in meal programs, in part due to the removal of the stigma of "free lunch." In addition, there is no room for error in identifying food-challenged students with the elimination of paper applications. Students in school meal programs are also more likely to eat healthier foods, including fruits, vegetables, and milk. In turn, these healthier eating habits positively impact lower childhood obesity. Removing the transaction of paying for meals also results in more time for students to eat. According to Levin and Hewins, families also benefit strongly from free meal programs as it reduces their financial burden of purchasing two meals a day for their children.

Lastly, research shows that a consistently well-fed student is a better student, test-taker and participant in school. Participation in the free meal programs is also linked to fewer absences, increased attention span, decreased tardiness and behavior problems, and overall, an improved school environment.

For these reasons, PSSAM **supports** House Bill 628 and urges a favorable report.