

Food is the Most Important School Supply

Food, the most important school supply, may make its way to all students if a bill currently in committee makes its way through the NC General Assembly

RALEIGH, NC, UNITED STATES, June 6, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The most important school

“

No child should go hungry, especially when in school. Children should be focused on learning, not worrying if they can get enough to eat; HB844 ensures nutritious meals for all public school students.”

Representative Julie von Haefen, NC House

supply is food. Every child needs enough food to be healthy and alert so they can do well in school. For many children in North Carolina, school is the best place to get healthy meals. Educators know that hungry students struggle to learn; children who eat healthy school meals do better in school. As the state looks to improve educational outcomes, we must first look to the basics: no-cost school meals for all.

In North Carolina, [1 in 6 children experiences hunger](#) on a daily basis. [Child poverty rates](#) vary widely across counties, but all regions have some counties with high rates. According to the Budget & Tax Center, child poverty rates

reach a high of 62% in Hyde County on North Carolina’s eastern border.

Kids who eat healthy school meals do better in school.(1) They are more attentive and engaged in the classroom, leading to better grades, higher attendance rates, fewer suspensions, and higher graduation rates. Schoolwide free-meal programs also provide access to meals for students who may not qualify under income-based formulas. Studies have shown improved math performance and fewer suspensions when schools provide universal access to free meals. (2)

States are acting on this knowledge, creating universal free lunch programs to benefit all students. In 2021, California and Maine passed universal free lunch legislation, followed by Minnesota, New Mexico, Colorado, Vermont, Michigan, and Massachusetts. More than 25 additional states have efforts underway (e.g., introduced legislation or advocacy coalitions) to provide universal free lunch access. (3)

Much of this expansion is due to the [Community Eligibility Provision](#) (CEP) funded by the federal government. The CEP program launched in 2014-15 to allow schools with many low-income students—based on an “Identified Student Percentage” calculation—to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students. While many schools across North Carolina currently participate in the

program, some schools do not because of the expensive reimbursement rates and copay requirements. Participating schools generally have the highest proportions of low-income students.

In North Carolina, 81% of registered voters (4) support providing no-cost school meals to all students. Dollar for dollar school meals for all is one of the best investments we can make in student success. School Meals for ALL NC, a coalition of organizations dedicated to promoting free meals for students has been sharing information and lobbying legislators and has seen some results.

In the 2023 budget, North Carolina's legislators passed legislation to prohibit public schools from no longer withholding transcripts, report cards or health records or refusing to allow a student to participate in graduation or receive a diploma. While public schools are not allowed to penalize students for unpaid school lunch debt, this alone does not eliminate the shame associated with not having money to pay for meals.

A bill that would eliminate children choosing not to eat or being shamed over owing money is. House Bill 844 (School Meals for All Act which is currently languishing in committee. This bill includes funding to provide school meals for all students at no cost to the family requesting \$172 million in recurring funds to offer students breakfast and lunch at no cost.

The 2024 legislative session is set to end on July 1, so legislators must act fast to spend some of the nearly billion dollar budget surplus to provide students with no-cost school meals in coming years. North Carolina's legislators have shown that when motivated, they can move legislation quickly. At the beginning of this year's session it took senators less than a week to pass legislation to increase school vouchers funding by \$248 million for next year. The School Meals for All Act comes at a much smaller price tag and benefits ALL students, especially those in the lower-income rural counties.

Will North Carolina students finally be assured the most important school supply of all?

(1) Free Lunch for All! The Effect of the Community Eligibility Provision on Academic Outcomes
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775719307605>

(2) Schoolwide free-meal programs fuel better classroom outcomes for students
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/schoolwide-free-meal-programs-fuel-better-classroom-outcomes-for-students/>

(3) What are the benefits of free school meals? Here's what the research says
https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/universal-free-school-meals-benefits-research-183830440.html?_guc_consent_skip=1717113938

(4) School Meals for All NC <https://schoolmealsforallnc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SMFANC-Breakfast-Benefits.pdf>

Heather Koons

+1 919-749-6184

[email us here](#)

Public Schools First NC

Visit us on social media:

[Facebook](#)

[X](#)

[LinkedIn](#)

[Instagram](#)

[YouTube](#)

[TikTok](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/717681671>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2024 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.