



# Maryland Education Coalition



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Date: March 15, 2022  
BILL: [SB971](#) / [HB857](#)  
POSITION: Support

TITLE: Education – Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program – School Lunch  
COMMITTEE: Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

SB971 - Education – Concentration of Poverty School Grant Program – School Lunch - establishes a free school lunch program for students in schools that have been identified for participation in the State’s Concentration of Poverty Grant Program. The bill mandates the Governor to allocate in their budget beginning in fiscal year 2024 funding to provide school lunch at no charge for students who attend a community school but are not eligible for free or reduced meals. The Concentration of Poverty Grant Program is a state grant program for schools at 55% concentration of poverty or greater. The program provides state resources to hire a Community School Coordinator, expand school based health services, and implement the Community Schools Strategy. This bill would ensure that all children in a Community School have access to subsidized free lunch. Schools would only be eligible for this expanded feeding program if the school or the LEA also applies for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Community Eligibility Provision and any other Federal programs that provide school lunch reimbursement.

According to the [Maryland food bank](#) 1 in 3 Marylanders face food insecurity. Families are often faced with the decision of balancing tight budgets, including choosing between purchasing enough food for three full meals a day, paying rent, providing for their transportation needs, or covering other expenses such as electricity, water, and healthcare bills. When choosing between rent and electricity versus food, housing can take precedence. Meaning that children go hungry or eat less calories a day than they need to grow healthy. Further exacerbating this issue are food deserts otherwise known as Limited Supermarket Access (LSA) areas. A food access [market analysis](#) by the Reinvestment Fund, found that 602,845 or 9.6% of Marylanders live in LSA areas, of whom 48% live in low-income census block groups. When ranked by the percentage of the population that is both low income and living in an LSA area, Maryland ranked tenth in the nation. At the time of the analysis Maryland had 38 LSA areas consisting of 498 block groups across 13 counties.

Ensuring that Maryland school children do not go hungry is not just a moral issue, it is also an academic issue. The Research paper, [Estimating Impacts of a Breakfast in the Classroom Program on School Outcomes](#), found that schools that instituted school breakfast programs showed improved rates of student attendance compared to schools that did not. Regular student attendance is a key factor in student success in school.

If we are to build a World Class education system, we must ensure that no Maryland school child goes hungry. Expanding Maryland’s Concentration of Poverty Grant program to be inclusive of ensuring every child has access to a free lunch is a commonsense approach to furthering the impact of this strategic investment.

*The Maryland Education Coalition (MEC) is the oldest, largest, most experienced, and diverse group of public education stakeholders in Maryland. We are an independent, non-partisan voice for Maryland’s K-12 students. MEC’s goal is to ensure adequate, equitable funding, policies and accountability for the estimated 900,000 public school students in Maryland and is committed to advocating for state education policies that deliver on the constitutional right and civil right for all students to access a high-quality, competitive education.*

For these and other reasons, we urge a favorable report for HB857.

American Civil Liberties Union of MD, Arts Education in Maryland Schools, Arts Every Day, Attendance Works, CASA, Children’s Behavioral Health Coalition, Decoding Dyslexia of MD, Disability Rights Maryland, League of Women Voters of MD, Let Them See Clearly, Right to Read Maryland, Maryland Coalition for Community Schools, Maryland Coalition for Gifted & Talented Ed, Maryland Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition, Maryland Out of School Time Network, Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education, MSC-NAACP, Maryland School Psychologists’ Association, Parent Advocacy Consortium, Public Justice Center, School Social Workers of MD, Strong Schools Maryland, Kalman Hettleman, David Hornbeck, Shanetta Martin, Sharon Rubinstein, Rick Tyler, Jr.