

Greetings Chairman Owens and House Education Committee Members,

I am writing in regards to HB 1413, using the Legacy Funds to provide free meals for students in North Dakota. Since this would impact my program directly, I would like to offer some thoughts regarding the bill from my perspective. In theory, this appears to be a great benefit to the students of North Dakota. Parents would not have to worry about paying for breakfast and lunch for two school years. This would reduce paperwork for our districts and possibly make it a more seamless process for serving meals. If this bill moves forward, I would encourage members of the Legislature to hear input and thoughts from local child nutrition experts that work in these programs.

A few things to consider when examining the details of the bill:

1. Many grants and title funds are based strictly on free/reduced percentages in the district. How would free/reduced data be collected? There would need to be some funding model put in place because the free/reduced numbers would be affected.
2. Does this bill indicate that only "paid" students would receive the free meals? Would Free/Reduced Meal applications continue to be filled out? Would we collect the Federal Funds for those meals and then "bill" the state for any paid student meals. This might be a nightmare to implement because we would be telling families to fill out the free and reduced application but if they don't qualify, the state of North Dakota will still pay for their meals. This would not allow any motivation for families to fill out the application. We already have trouble getting parents to fill out the application under normal circumstances!
3. Many families do not want the government help to pay for meals. The USDA has granted waivers this year for us to serve all breakfasts and lunches for free at no charge to students, which has lessened our paperwork burden, however, there are still families who do not want the governments help and say they can pay for meals.
4. Something to consider might be using the Legacy Funds for **reduced-eligible students** only. The North Dakota budget already includes paying for any **reduced student breakfast**. (\$30). This could be expanded to include the parent portion of the reduced price lunch (\$40). We would still collect the federal money for the reduced meal but collect the reimbursement from North Dakota for the \$40 instead of from struggling families. Families would still have to fill out the Free/Reduced application and we would still have those numbers for Title Funds, Grants, etc., This approach would also specifically target working families in need who would benefit most from it.

Please reach out to me or food service directors in your local area if you need any more information. Thank you for your time and consideration. This is my contact information if you have any questions: Lynelle Johnson, Lynelle.johnson@willistonschools.org, 701-651-0164

Lynelle Johnson
Food Service Director
Williston Public Schools