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Office of Research
and Drafting

Legislative Budget
Office

H.B. 408
135th General Assembly

Bill Analysis

Version: As Introduced

Primary Sponsors: Reps. Brewer and Mohamed

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SUMMARY

- Requires each public school to provide a meal to any student who requests one.
- Prohibits certain conduct by schools toward students who cannot pay for a meal or has meal debt.
- Requires the Department of Education to provide guidance to all districts and schools regarding the collection of student meal debt.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Student meals

The bill requires school districts, community schools, STEM schools, and college-preparatory boarding schools to provide each student a meal who requests one, regardless of whether the student can pay or owes a meal debt.¹ The bill also prohibits a district or school from:²

1. Requiring a student to discard a meal because of the student's inability to pay or because the student owes a meal debt;
2. Requiring a student who cannot pay for a meal or owes a meal debt to do chores or work to pay for meals; however, a student may be required to do chores or work if all students are required to do so regardless of meal debt;
3. Refusing a meal to a student as a form of disciplinary action; and

¹ R.C. 3313.819(A). The bill applies to community schools, STEM schools, and college-preparatory boarding schools through cross references in R.C. 3314.03(A)(11)(d), 3326.11, and 3328.24, respectively.

² R.C. 3313.819(B).

4. Publically identifying or stigmatizing a student who cannot pay for a meal or owes a meal debt.

Communications about meal debts

The bill requires each district or school to communicate directly with a parent or guardian, and not a student, about the student’s meal debt. However, the bill expressly permits the district or school to answer a student’s inquiry about the student’s meal debt. The bill also clarifies that a school may send a student home with a letter addressed to a parent or guardian regarding an outstanding debt.³

Guidance for collecting meal debt

The bill requires the Department of Education to provide districts and schools with guidance about collecting student meal debt. The guidance must also include best practices and information for creating an online system for the payment of school debt. The Department must post the guidance on its website.⁴

Note that H.B. 408 was drafted before the enactment, in 2023, of H.B. 33 of the 135th General Assembly, which renamed the Department of Education to the Department of Education and Workforce.

HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	02-12-24

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³ R.C. 3313.819(C).

⁴ R.C. 3313.819(D).