

SENATE, No. 1615

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 13, 2020

Sponsored by:

Senator FRED H. MADDEN, JR.

District 4 (Camden and Gloucester)

Senator JAMES BEACH

District 6 (Burlington and Camden)

SYNOPSIS

Requires school districts take certain actions to increase participation in free or reduced priced meal programs; prohibits shaming students with school meal bills in arrears; prohibits certain district actions in collecting unpaid school meal fees.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 3/5/2020)

1 AN ACT concerning school meals and amending P.L.2015, c.15.

2

3 **BE IT ENACTED** by the Senate and General Assembly of the State
4 of New Jersey:

5

6 1. Section 1 of P.L.2015, c.15 (C.18A:33-21) is amended to
7 read as follows:

8 1. a. In the event that a school district determines that a
9 student's school breakfast or school lunch bill is in arrears, the
10 district shall contact the student's parent or guardian to provide
11 notice of the arrearage and shall provide the parent or guardian with
12 a period of 10 school days to pay the amount due. If the student's
13 parent or guardian has not made full payment by the end of the 10
14 school days, then the district shall again contact the student's parent
15 or guardian to provide notice that school breakfast or school lunch,
16 as applicable, shall not be served to the student beginning one week
17 from the date of the second notice unless payment is made in full.

18 A school district shall report at least biannually to the
19 Department of Agriculture the number of students who are denied
20 school breakfast or school lunch pursuant to this section.

21 Nothing in this section shall be construed to require a school
22 district to deny or restrict access to school breakfast or school lunch
23 to a student whose school breakfast or school lunch bill is in
24 arrears.

25 b. Prior to initially contacting the parent or guardian to provide
26 notice of a school breakfast or school lunch bill in arrears as
27 provided in subsection a. of this section, the school district shall
28 exhaust all options and methods to directly certify the student for a
29 free or reduced priced meal. If the school district is not able to
30 directly certify the student, the school district shall provide the
31 parent or guardian with a paper copy of, or an electronic link to, an
32 application for the free or reduced priced meal program with the
33 notification of the arrearage and contact the parent or guardian to
34 encourage application submission.

35 c. A school district shall ensure that a student whose school
36 breakfast or school lunch bill is in arrears is not shamed, treated
37 differently, forced to go to the end of the food line, or served a meal
38 that differs from what a student whose school breakfast or school
39 lunch bill is not in arrears would receive. This subsection shall not
40 prohibit a school district from serving an alternative reimbursable
41 meal to a student who may need one for dietary or religious reasons.

42 d. A school district shall not permit any action directed at a
43 student to collect unpaid school meal fees. A school district may
44 attempt to collect unpaid school meal fees from a parent or

EXPLANATION – Matter enclosed in bold-faced brackets **[thus]** in the above bill is
not enacted and is intended to be omitted in the law.

Matter underlined thus is new matter.

1 guardian, but shall not threaten to make a child protective services
2 report solely in regard to the arrearage.

3 (cf: P.L.2018, c.27, s.1)

4
5 2. This act shall take effect on the first day of the first full
6 school year following the date of enactment.

7
8
9 STATEMENT

10
11 This bill includes a number of provisions regarding a school
12 district's responsibilities when a student's school breakfast or
13 school lunch bill is in arrears. Pursuant to the bill, prior to
14 contacting the parent to provide notice of the school meal bill in
15 arrears, the school district is required to exhaust all options and
16 methods to directly certify the student for the free or reduced priced
17 meal program. If the school district is not able to directly certify
18 the student, when the district sends the notification of the arrearage
19 to the parent, it must include a paper copy of, or an electronic link
20 to, an application for the school meal program and contact the
21 parent to encourage submission of the application.

22 The bill also includes a provision that requires school districts to
23 ensure that a student whose school breakfast or school lunch bill is
24 in arrears is not shamed, treated differently, forced to go to the end
25 of the food line, or served a meal that differs from what a student
26 whose bill is not in arrears would receive. Under the bill, a district
27 may not permit any action directed at a student to collect unpaid
28 school meal fees. Districts may attempt to collect unpaid school
29 meal fees from parents, but the districts are not permitted to
30 threaten to make a child protective services report solely in regard
31 to the arrearage.

32 The bill also clarifies that nothing in section 1 of P.L.2015, c.15
33 (C.18A:33-21) requires a school district to deny school breakfast or
34 school lunch to a student whose bill is in arrears, but rather to
35 provide adequate notice and opportunity to the student's parent or
36 guardian if the district determines to take such an action.