

HUNTINGDON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Administrative Office



2400 Cassady Avenue, Suite 2, Huntingdon, PA 16652-2602
Phone (814) 643-4140 Fax (814) 643-6244



Jennifer Mitchell
Superintendent

Staci Young
Director of Student Services

Matthew R. Gibson
Business Manager

Dear Community and Families:

You might be seeing lots of information around the county about “free” breakfast and lunch programs and wondering what is going on with Huntingdon’s Food Service Program.

At the present, we have begun offering free breakfast as of October 1, 2022 for all students through the remainder of the 2022-23 school year. This was made possible by the State Governor’s actions.

We have not moved to offer free lunches. This is where you might be confused as to why not, since other districts around us have and in fact the Department of Education website names Huntingdon Area School District as being eligible for free lunches.

As a district, we have evaluated the feasibility of implementing the Community Eligibility Provision which allows all students to eat lunch (CEP). We are not ignoring the needs of students or the fact that we are eligible in the eyes of the state. Being eligible is just the first step. The next step would be to see if the program could benefit from the program overall. While we meet the threshold to apply, it does not mean this would in fact benefit the entire district. The program will look at a series of percentages for each building and district. It is not an easy thing to understand, but the facts below should help you see why we are currently not applying, despite being eligible.

At this time, **our district percentage of directly certified students is at 42% which is slightly above the minimum threshold of 40% to apply for this program.** Using a mathematical equation with that percentage would allow the district to be reimbursed for 67% of its meals at the free rate. Great news you might think, but that would leave the remaining 33% with no reimbursement. The district would essentially give everyone a free meal and we would only get paid back the money for 67% of the students as free. The district would need to pay out of our own budget for the other students causing an overall loss in the food program; therefore, negatively impacting the taxpayers of the district. It is an all or nothing program.

Think of it like this example, you take your family to a restaurant and the advertisement says “kids eat free”. You order dinner with your 4 kids thinking this is a great deal. However when you get your bill to be paid, you will notice that you were billed for your 3 children that were advertised as free. The fine print in the advertisement said children under 3 years of age eat

free. You therefore must pay for the three of your children and you were not prepared to do so. It seemed like a good deal and you did save a bit, but the overall program did not meet your expectations or help you. That is where we are at this time. Eligible but not beneficial to the Huntingdon Area School District. Other district percentages look different than ours, thus making it appropriate for them to move forward.

Effective October 1, 2022, Pennsylvania will increase the income threshold for all applicants from 160 percent to 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines. Families at 200% of the poverty income level receive free meals if they apply. Our neediest families and students in our community will continue to receive free meals. We also offer reduced pricing based on income levels. If you or someone you know has not applied or may now qualify with the change, please have them contact Ellen Riley at iriley@huntsd.org so we can assist.

What can happen next? We will continue to review and evaluate the information regularly with the possibility of applying for the program in the future. We will advocate and speak up to our local representatives to ask them to support free lunches for all students in our schools. We ask that you join us in also speaking up for the students in our community. Below is a list of local legislators depending on your municipality.

Representative Rich Irvin:

https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/member_information/house_bio.cfm?id=1691

Senator Judy Ward:

https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/member_information/senate_bio.cfm?id=1683

Senator Jake Corman:

https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/legis/home/member_information/senate_bio.cfm?id=251

Respectfully,



Jennifer Mitchell
Superintendent