

1 A JOINT RESOLUTION directing the Kentucky Department of Education to study
2 expanding student access to free and reduced-price school meals.

3 WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Kentucky recognizes that consistent access to
4 nutritious meals is essential to students' physical health, cognitive development,
5 classroom behavior, and academic performance; and

6 WHEREAS, Kentucky participates in the National School Lunch Program and the
7 School Breakfast Program, providing free or reduced-price meals to students whose
8 household incomes fall at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level; and

9 WHEREAS, many Kentucky families whose incomes exceed the current income
10 threshold still experience food insecurity and financial strain that can limit their
11 children's access to regular, nutritious meals during the school day; and

12 WHEREAS, schools that qualify for the federal Community Eligibility Provision
13 may offer universal free meals to all students, but numerous Kentucky schools have
14 financial or eligibility barriers to participation and thus remain unable to provide broader
15 meal access through federal reimbursement structures; and

16 WHEREAS, expanding eligibility for free school breakfast and lunch, while
17 remaining within current budget funding levels, may reduce food insecurity, improve
18 student wellbeing, and support higher academic achievement across the Commonwealth;

19 NOW, THEREFORE,

20 ***Be it resolved by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:***

21 ➔Section 1. (1) The Kentucky Department of Education is directed to
22 conduct a comprehensive study on the financial, regulatory, and operational impacts of
23 raising the free and reduced-price lunch eligibility threshold in the state from 185 percent
24 of the federal poverty level to 250 percent of the federal poverty level in schools that do
25 not currently participate in the Community Eligibility Provision.

26 (2) In performing the study required by subsection (1) of this section, the
27 Kentucky Department of Education shall consult with:

- 1 (a) School district food service directors;
- 2 (b) The School Nutrition Association of Kentucky;
- 3 (c) The Kentucky Department for Public Health;
- 4 (d) Relevant federal agencies, as appropriate; and
- 5 (e) Other stakeholders engaged in child nutrition and education policy.
- 6 (3) The Kentucky Department of Education shall submit a final study report and
- 7 recommendations to the Legislative Research Commission by November 1, 2026, for
- 8 referral to the appropriate Interim Joint Committee on Education that identifies one or
- 9 more viable methods of expanding eligibility for Kentucky students to access free and
- 10 reduced-price school meals within current budget limits and includes:
- 11 (a) The projected increase in student eligibility for free school lunch and
- 12 breakfast if the eligibility income threshold is raised from 185 percent of the federal
- 13 poverty level to 250 percent of the federal poverty level;
- 14 (b) Estimated costs and savings of increasing the eligibility income threshold,
- 15 including opportunities to offset costs through existing federal reimbursements,
- 16 administrative efficiencies, or alternative funding models;
- 17 (c) Analysis of current and projected meal participation rates, food service
- 18 capacity, and expected nutritional and academic benefits;
- 19 (d) Comparison of alternative potential models for expanding student access to
- 20 free and reduced-price school meals, including sliding scale reimbursement rates, tiered
- 21 eligibility structures, or statewide waivers;
- 22 (e) Review of other states' policies implementing expanded school meal access;
- 23 and
- 24 (f) Identification of barriers to implementation, including statutory, regulatory, or
- 25 fiscal barriers, and recommendations for addressing those barriers.