

## <strong>15 schools will get free lunch, IL will not</strong>

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### Content

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South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster recently passed a proviso, forcing each school district to vote on increasing access to free school lunch.

At the July 11 meeting, Lancaster County School District's Board of Trustees voted to give 15 area schools free lunch certification. That's all county schools except for those in the Panhandle.

The hotly debated issue was brought to the floor by LCSD Food Service Director Angela McCrorey, who said it was the hardest decision she has had to make, after nearly two hours of debate in open session.

Board member Melvin Stroble, who represents Indian Land, led the opposition, stating that by approving only 15 schools, instead of finding a way to include all schools in the district, it was a clear show that the school board is prioritizing economic gain over fairness to all district children.

### All schools don't qualify

The Indian Land area schools do not qualify due to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP is a non-pricing meal service option for schools and school districts in low-income areas that allows the nation's highest poverty schools and districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications, according to SC.gov.

"This concept, because the state Legislature just passed the proviso, is stating that school boards have to now take action in regards to community eligibility," McCrorey said. "Basically, if we have schools that can be community eligible, we should make them eligible."

The schools that qualify and will be able to offer free meals to all students are: Brooklyn Springs, Clinton, Erwin, McDonald Green, North, Heath Springs, Kershaw and Buford elementaries; South, A.R. Rucker, Andrew Jackson and Buford middle schools; and Lancaster, Andrew Jackson and Buford high schools.

The percentage required — 40% or more “identified students,” or children certified eligible for free school meals — is met in those 15 schools, but not the Indian Land schools.

Harrisburg, Van Wyck and Indian Land elementaries, Indian Land Intermediate, Indian Land Middle and Indian Land High School do not qualify.

Stroble remained adamant that by passing the proviso, Indian Land schools will continue to be discriminated against because Indian Land will never qualify via CEP.

“I’m going to tell you now, when you look at the per capital for Indian Land versus the rest of this county, there is a \$50,000-\$60,000 difference,” he said. “And this board is telling those parents and those kids, we’re not going to give you free lunch ever.”

“Angela, she can tell you the number and the percentages of our folks in the Indian Land area every year,” Stroble said. “And it doesn’t change that much. Yes, Indian Land is growing. Yes, we’re gonna have more students, but that’s what we’re here for. We’re here to educate every child, we’re here to make sure every child eats.”

Students in the Indian Land schools can still get free or reduced-price meals, but their parents will need to fill out the Free and Reduced Meal Price Application Form.

## **Board member comments**

Each board member, Dr. Jonathan Phipps and McCrorey acknowledged how difficult the decision was, because of the pressure the state Legislature put on local schools.

“I just think that it’s unfortunate that legislators would put us in a place of worry that we can’t do for the entire district; we don’t have the money to cover Indian Land,” said board member Eddie Boykin.

“I hate that the state has put us in this situation, but also think from a budgetary standpoint next year that we can probably find this somewhere and vote on it,” said board Chair Brad Small.

In order to cover Indian Land area schools with the CEP program, even though they do not qualify, it would cost the district roughly \$2 million, which would have to come from the general fund budget. This year’s budget was already voted on and passed, further complicating the matter.

Jatana Norris, the district’s finance chief, reminded the board that there are mid-year budget adjustments, but the motion to look into using general fund money failed.

“I hate that the state has put us in this position,” said board member Casey Cato. “Because it’s not fair all the way around; it’s not fair to the Indian Land group. But there are so many children in this area too. The state has put us in a bad position.”

The ultimate vote to approve was preceded by several motions and discussions by Stroble to delay the vote, pull from general funds and deny the vote until all schools qualified. Phipps recommended the board approve the provisio, and look at ways to include all schools next year.

The final vote passed, 4-2. Small, Cato, Boykin and Faulkner voted yes and Stroble and Courtney Green voted no. Martha Gamble was absent.