

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 411 (Pérez) – As Amended July 7, 2025

Policy Committee:	Education	Vote:	9 - 0
	Human Services		7 - 0

Urgency: No      State Mandated Local Program: Yes      Reimbursable: Yes

**SUMMARY:**

This bill requires the California Department of Education (CDE), with support from the State Department of Social Services (CDSS), to develop and provide a statewide web application on the internet enabling families to submit federally required information, in adherence with specified requirements, to determine eligibility for school meal programs beginning with the application for summer 2028 benefits.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

- 1) One-time General Fund costs of approximately \$3.2 million in the first year of implementation, and \$2.8 million ongoing, for the CDE to acquire an additional 12 staff and information technology resources necessary to develop and maintain the data system to collect income eligibility applications from families.
- 2) Minor and absorbable workload for the CDSS to support the CDE in developing the application website.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

Although California has undertaken tremendous efforts to provide and expand access to school meals, there are still existing gaps in accessibility on three major fronts. First, while California enrolled 5 million eligible students for SUN Bucks, there are still approximately 1.8 million eligible children yet to apply due because these students are not directly determined and eligible and enrolled. The second factor contributing to gap in access to school meals is reservations from families to apply for meals if their student's school is using a third party platform application. There are examples of third party based applications collecting sensitive information, which can be sold or compromised without notification.

SB 411 addresses the aforementioned gaps in school meal access by creating an accessible and secure year-round child nutrition safety net program by: establishing a statewide website for families to apply for SUN Bucks; requiring school meal applications to include the SUN

Bucks application; codifying key child privacy protections to protect personal data; as well as supporting school nutrition professional opportunities to work additional hours providing on-site meal options during school breaks and emergency closures.

- 2) **Background. School Meal Programs.** Federal nutrition programs such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program support LEAs serving meals to students during the school day. LEAs participating in these programs receive a per-meal reimbursement rate which varies by student based on household income (commonly referred to as eligibility for free- or reduced-price meals). Additionally, the state supplements federal funds for these programs with additional state funds for each meal served.

The Budget Act of 2022 established California's Universal Meal Program requiring every school district, COE, and charter school to provide two nutritionally adequate meals to any student who requests them, regardless of income eligibility. LEAs must participate in the NSLP and School Breakfast program in order to receive reimbursement from the state for these meals. However, federal funds are provided only for meals served to income-eligible students, which necessitates LEAs to still collect family income information for purposes of federal reimbursement. Additionally, because the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) provides supplemental funding to LEAs partially based on their concentration of low-income students, defined as students eligible for free- or reduced-price meals, accurate reporting of this information has significant fiscal implications for LEAs.

***SUN Bucks and the Universal Benefits Application.*** Established by the federal government in 2023, the SUN Bucks, or Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) program provides permanent EBT benefits to students over the summer when school is not in session. Eligible students receive an EBT card with \$120 to purchase eligible groceries. The CDSS administers the SUN Bucks program in collaboration with the CDE.

While existing federal requirements allow some LEAs to receive reimbursement for students without each student individually identified as eligible (known as Community Eligible Provision or Provision 2 schools), the SUN Bucks program requires individual student eligibility verification to receive the benefit. This misalignment across federal meal programs created the need for a universal benefits application (UBA), which the Legislature, through SB 153 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 38, Statutes of 2024, required CDE to develop to meet the purposes of eligibility for supplemental LCFF funding and federal meal programs, including SUN Bucks. Recently, the CDE completed and published the UBA, however, federal regulations did not require the UBA to be an interactive web-based tool and it exists as a downloadable form on CDE's website for LEA use, translated into several languages. This bill requires the CDE, with support from the CDSS, to develop and provide a UBA that allows families to complete and submit the required information completely online.