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For Immediate Release

Sylacauga City Schools meal programs qualify for Provision 2

Sylacauga, AL... Beginning September 1, all students of Sylacauga City Schools will be able to eat breakfast and lunch at no charge thanks to the district's eligibility for a pilot of the USDA Provision 2 program.

Kelley Wassermann, Director of Child Nutrition Programs, explained by saying, "This year we received great response in families returning the Free and Reduced Meals Application. This response rate, plus the number of students approved by direct certification, is enough to qualify the entire school district for Provision 2 eligibility."

Wassermann pointed out that the free and reduced percentage for Sylacauga is nearly 70%, a significant increase from the pre-Covid years. During the last two school years, all students across the country ate school meals at no charge because of USDA waivers, which expired June 30 of this year.

"Before Covid disrupted everything two and half years ago, Sylacauga averaged about 57% free and reduced. The last few years have been difficult for everyone. I am glad we were able to qualify for Provision 2 and give our families some relief from the burden of paying for meals," she said.

Sylacauga has maintained meal charges of \$1.50 for breakfast and \$2.45 for lunch for the last five years. Wassermann said that earlier in the summer when she was calculating the prices for student meals, she recommended to the school board to leave prices where they were.

"Families were paying so much more for basic necessities, like gas and groceries," she explained. "I was concerned that if we raised prices, we would lose participation and defeat the purpose of trying to serve nutritional meals."

Wassermann went on to clarify that the school district is only piloting the Provision 2 program.

"After the first semester, a financial analysis will be conducted to determine whether or not we can afford to continue in Provision 2. The Child Nutrition Program must absorb the unpaid cost of reduced and paid students not being charged for their portion of the meals. We can continue the program only for as long as our fund balance is strong enough to carry this extra cost."

Students will still be required to pay for their meals through August 31. Wassermann added that it is important for parents who have not already submitted a Free and Reduced Price Meal application to do so by August 31. The approved applications are required in order for households to qualify for the new round of P-EBT benefits. Any applications received after August 31 will not be eligible for P-EBT benefits.

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