COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

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November 1, 2026

The Honorable L. Louise Lucas, Chair
Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee
General Assembly Building
201 N. 9th Street, 13th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

The Honorable Luke E. Torian, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
General Assembly Building
201 N. 9th Street, 12th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Senator Lucas and Delegate Torian:

Chapter 54, 2026 Acts of Assembly requires the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to annually collect from each school board the amount of school meal debt in the local school division and submit the information to the General Assembly. The Department collected such information from local school divisions and presents the information in this report. As of June 30, 2026, the statewide school meal debt for Virginia school divisions was $8,627,247.48.

Sincerely,

Jenna Conway
Superintendent of Public Instruction
JC/SB/cc

cc: The Honorable Abigail D. Spanberger
The Honorable Danica A. Roem, Chair Virginia Commission to End Hunger
The Honorable Marcia S. (Cia) Price, Vice Chair, Virginia Commission to End Hunger

2026 School Meal Debt Report

Chapter 54 (2026 Regular Session, Acts of Assembly)

November 1, 2026

Virginia Department of Education

PREFACE

House Bill 210, Chapter 54, 2026 Acts of Assembly (Appendix A) requires that:

> *Each school board shall annually report to the Department the amount of school meal debt in the local school division. The Department shall annually aggregate and submit such reports to the General Assembly. No such report shall contain any personally identifiable student information.*

The Virginia Department of Education, Office of School and Community and Nutrition Programs collected student meal debt information from each local school division, reviewed the data, and aggregated it for this report. As of June 30, 2026, the school meal debt total for Virginia school divisions was $8,627,247.48.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are many factors that contribute to school meal debt. Schools may or may not accrue meal debt depending on their status as a pricing or non-pricing school. Of the 131 local school divisions (Local Education Agency, or LEA) in Virginia in school year 2025-26:

- 14 were fully pricing, requiring a meal payment for students receiving meals in the paid eligibility category in all schools in the division;
- 22 were mixed, with some pricing and some non-pricing schools, and;
- 95 were fully non-pricing, serving meals to all students at no cost through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and collecting no student meal payments.

As of June 30, 2026, the statewide school meal debt in Virginia school divisions was $8,627,247.48. School divisions in Superintendent's Region 4, Northern Virginia, are some of the largest in student population and account for 56.1% of Virginia's total meal debt.

Appendix B summarizes the meal debt by local school division, including a CEP indicator.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAMS IN VIRGINIA

The 131 LEAs in Virginia are required to participate in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) (*Code of Virginia* 22.1-79.7:1). Through the NSLP and SBP public schools in Virginia offer meals that meet nutrition standards and meal pattern requirements and receive federal and state per meal support for the cost of the meal. Meal reimbursement is based on the free, reduced-price, or paid eligibility category of the student. The Virginia Department of Education, Office of School and Community Nutrition Programs (VDOE-SCNP) administers these and other federal child nutrition programs.

Public schools in Virginia served more than 64 million breakfasts and 114 million lunches through the USDA meal programs in SY 2025-26.

SCHOOL MEAL DEBT

In Virginia, school meals must be available to any student who requests a meal, regardless of whether the student has money to pay or owes money for meals previously provided (*Code of Virginia* 22.1-79.7:1).

The *Code of Virginia § 22.1-79.7*, requires local school boards to adopt policies to ensure students with school meal debt are not treated differently or penalized because of the debt. The policies must include the following:

- Prohibit school board employees from requiring a student who cannot pay for a meal at school or who owes a school meal debt to throw away or discard a meal after it has been served, do chores or other work to pay for such meals, or wear a wristband or hand stamp;
- Require school board employees to direct any communication relating to a school meal debt to the student's parent. Such policy may permit such communication to be made by a letter addressed to the parent to be sent home with the student;
- Prohibit the school board from filing a lawsuit against a student or the student's parent because the student cannot pay for a meal at school or owes a school meal debt; and,
- Prohibit the school board or any school board employee from denying a student the opportunity to participate in any extracurricular school activity because the student cannot pay for a meal at school or owes a school meal debt.

These protections ensure that students are not stigmatized or penalized for meal debt. As a result, schools that charge students for school meals must allow meal debt, which may accrue over time. When the debt is determined to be bad debt is dependent on the LEA meal debt policy and the debt can carryover from year to year. Bad debt from school meals, when determined to be uncollectable and written off as a loss, is an unallowable cost to the nonprofit school food service account. LEAs must use other non-federal funds to restore the uncollectable meal debt to the non-profit school food service program.

School Meal Debt in Virginia

The VDOE-SCNP collected school meal debt data reports from each local school division to capture the school meal debt landscape in Virginia. A team reviewed the information, and aggregated it to determine as of June 30, 2026, the total school meal debt among Virginia public school divisions was $8,627,247.48 (Appendix B). Appendix B denotes those school divisions that participate in CEP division wide and those with some schools participating.

Community Eligibility Provision and School Meal Debt

CEP is the non-pricing meal service option in NSLP/SBP and allows eligible schools and divisions to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students. This means schools participating in CEP do not incur school meal debt. Among school divisions that participate in CEP division wide, school meal debt totaled $118,500.06 or 1.37% of the total statewide debt. CEP participating schools may have meal debt, based on when they began operating CEP and the LEA meal debt policy for converting uncollectable debt to bad debt.

In SY 2025-26, of the 131 school divisions in Virginia:

- 95 participated in CEP division-wide
- 22 had select schools that participated in CEP
- 14 did not have any schools that participated in CEP

APPENDICES

Appendix A: HB 210

CHAPTER 54

An Act to amend and reenact § 22.1-79.7 of the Code of Virginia, relating to school meal debt; annual report.

Approved April 2, 2026

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

That § 22.1-79.7 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows: § 22.1-79.7. School meal policies; donations.

A. Each local school board shall adopt policies that:
   1. Prohibit school board employees from requiring a student who cannot pay for a meal at school or who owes a school meal debt to throw away or discard a meal after it has been served to him, do chores or other work to pay for such meals, or wear a wristband or hand stamp;
   2. Require school board employees to direct any communication relating to a school meal debt to the student's parent. Such policy may permit such communication to be made by a letter addressed to the parent to be sent home with the student;
   3. Prohibit the school board from filing a lawsuit against a student or the student's parent because the student cannot pay for a meal at school or owes a school meal debt; and
   4. Prohibit the school board or any school board employee from denying a student the opportunity to participate in any extracurricular school activity because the student cannot pay for a meal at school or owes a school meal debt.

B. Any school board may solicit and receive any donation or other funds for the purpose of eliminating or offsetting any school meal debt at any time and shall use any such funds solely for such purpose.

C. *Each school board shall annually report to the Department the amount of school meal debt in the local school division. The Department shall annually aggregate and submit such reports to the General Assembly. No such report shall contain any personally identifiable student information.*

Appendix B: Virginia School Meal Debt by Division as of June 30, 2026

Div ID	Division Name	Total Meal Debt	Division wide CEP in SY2025-26*	Some schools CEP in SY2025-26**
001	Accomack County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
002	Albemarle County Public Schools	$247,640.61		X
003	Alleghany Highlands Public Schools	$0.00	X	
004	Amelia County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
005	Amherst County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
006	Appomattox County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
007	Arlington County Public Schools	$983,515.61		X
008	Augusta County Public Schools	$6,115.70	X	
009	Bath County Public Schools	$1.20	X	
010	Bedford County Public Schools	$56,534.43		X
011	Bland County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
012	Botetourt County Public Schools	$9,204.90		X
013	Brunswick County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
014	Buchanan County Public Schools	$359.70	X	
015	Buckingham County Public Schools	$59.60	X	
016	Campbell County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
017	Caroline County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
018	Carroll County Public Schools	$599.04	X	
019	Charles City County Public Schools	$39.70	X	
020	Charlotte County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
021	Chesterfield County Public Schools	$341,079.70		X
022	Clarke County Public Schools	$13,033.54		
023	Craig County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
024	Culpeper County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
025	Cumberland County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
026	Dickenson County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
027	Dinwiddie County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
028	Essex County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
029	Fairfax County Public Schools	$2,984,759.78		X
030	Fauquier County Public Schools	$148,218.08		X
031	Floyd County Public Schools	$14.42	X	
032	Fluvanna County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
033	Franklin County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
034	Frederick County Public Schools	$0.00		X
035	Giles County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
036	Gloucester County Public Schools	$21,813.33		
037	Goochland County Public Schools	$28,488.18		

Div ID	Division Name	Total Meal Debt	Division wide CEP in SY2025-26*	Some schools CEP in SY2025-26**
038	Grayson County Public Schools	$291.88	X	
039	Greene County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
040	Greensville County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
041	Halifax County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
042	Hanover County Public Schools	$72,480.80		X
043	Henrico County Public Schools	$301,357.12		X
044	Henry County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
045	Highland County Public Schools	$560.70		
046	Isle of Wight County Public Schools	$75,276.57		X
048	King George County Public Schools	$182,789.19		X
049	King and Queen County Public Schools	$61.01	X	
050	King William County Public Schools	$40,985.53		
051	Lancaster County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
052	Lee County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
053	Loudoun County Public Schools	$248,317.48		X
054	Louisa County Public Schools	$40.90	X	
055	Lunenburg County Public Schools	$21.60	X	
056	Madison County Public Schools	$5,933.45	X	
057	Mathews County Public Schools	$551.72	X	
058	Mecklenburg County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
059	Middlesex County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
060	Montgomery County Public Schools	$8,491.54		X
062	Nelson County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
063	New Kent County Public Schools	$790.74		
065	Northampton County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
066	Northumberland County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
067	Nottoway County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
068	Orange County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
069	Page County Public Schools	$16,571.90	X	
070	Patrick County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
071	Pittsylvania County Public Schools	$4.25	X	
072	Powhatan County Public Schools	$29,208.68		
073	Prince Edward County Public Schools	$5.75	X	
074	Prince George County Public Schools	$51,844.66		
075	Prince William County Public Schools	$292,595.42		X
077	Pulaski County Public Schools	$1.90	X	
078	Rappahannock County Public Schools	$0.00	X	

Div ID	Division Name	Total Meal Debt	Division wide CEP in SY2025-26*	Some schools CEP in SY2025-26**
079	Richmond County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
080	Roanoke County Public Schools	$153,337.40		X
081	Rockbridge County Public Schools	$4.85	X	
082	Rockingham County Public Schools	$83,760.56		
083	Russell County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
084	Scott County Public Schools	$2,542.02	X	
085	Shenandoah County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
086	Smyth County Public Schools	$1,985.66	X	
087	Southampton County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
088	Spotsylvania County Public Schools	$71,775.48	X	
089	Stafford County Public Schools	$472,089.30		X
090	Surry County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
091	Sussex County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
092	Tazewell County Public Schools	$6,101.46	X	
093	Warren County Public Schools	$296.15	X	
094	Washington County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
095	Westmoreland County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
096	Wise County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
097	Wythe County Public Schools	$0.00	X	
098	York County Public Schools	$153,784.90		
101	Alexandria City Public Schools	$141,873.00		X
102	Bristol City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
103	Buena Vista City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
104	Charlottesville City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
106	Colonial Heights City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
108	Danville City Public Schools	$1.20	X	
109	Falls Church City Public Schools	$5,373.20		
110	Fredericksburg City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
111	Galax City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
112	Hampton City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
113	Harrisonburg City Public Schools	$4,732.88	X	
114	Hopewell City Public Schools	$4.50	X	
115	Lynchburg City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
116	Martinsville City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
117	Newport News City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
118	Norfolk City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
119	Norton City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
120	Petersburg City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
121	Portsmouth City Public Schools	$301.94	X	

Div ID	Division Name	Total Meal Debt	Division wide CEP in SY2025-26*	Some schools CEP in SY2025-26**
122	Radford City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
123	Richmond City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
124	Roanoke City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
126	Staunton City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
127	Suffolk City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
128	Virginia Beach City Public Schools	$448,605.18		X
130	Waynesboro City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
131	Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools	$65.22		X
132	Winchester City Public Schools	$42.70	X	
135	Franklin City Public Schools	$37.50	X	
136	Chesapeake City Public Schools	$881,474.37		X
137	Lexington City Public Schools	$332.60		
139	Salem City Public Schools	$10,674.03		X
142	Poquoson City Public Schools	$18,330.15		
143	Manassas City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
144	Manassas Park City Public Schools	$0.00	X	
202	Colonial Beach Public Schools	$0.00	X	
207	West Point Public Schools	$60.92		
Total		**$8,627,247.48**	95 school divisions	22 school divisions

*Division wide CEP in SY2025-26: All schools in the school division participate in CEP and serve lunch and breakfast free of charge to all students.

**Some Schools CEP in SY2025-26: Some schools in the school division participate in CEP and serve lunch and breakfast free of charge to all students.