

School Meals Help Hungry Students Succeed



Everyone is better off when children can focus on achieving their dreams, not their hunger pangs – yet **1 in 6 Washington kids struggled with food insecurity before the pandemic**, and according to recent census data, **1 in 8 Washington adults with children now have difficulty affording food for their whole household.**

When schools re-open in the fall, tens of thousands of low-income students who have had access to free school meals since COVID began will once again have to pay for reduced-price lunches. School meals are intended to ensure there are nutritious meals low-income kids can count on each day, but too many Washington students miss out because their families can't afford it.

Eliminate Lunch Co-pay for Low Income Students (HB 1342)

- A family of four that is eligible for reduced-price school lunches must make ends meet on a monthly income of just \$3,970. That's less than \$4,000 to pay monthly rent, buy groceries, and pay bills for necessities like utilities and the afterschool childcare needed while parents work full-time. **Families live paycheck to paycheck and one emergency can create a financial crisis.**

If that same family of four has a 4th grader and a 6th grader, they pay as much as \$146 per school year in co-pays for reduced-price school lunches – a significant sum that could be cushion the impact of fixing a flat tire to get to work or paying the water bill.

In 2007, Washington eliminated lunch co-pays for children in kindergarten through 3rd grade – but has stopped short of covering more students since then. Meanwhile, states like Oregon and Colorado have passed legislation to eliminate lunch co-pays for students in some or all grades. HB 1342 eliminates the co-pay for reduced price lunches for all low-income students – helping low-income students thrive and easing the burden on struggling families.