

School meals for all students at no cost

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

The results are indisputable. When kids get the nourishment they need during the school day, they perform better in the classroom. Attendance and math scores go up, tardiness and the number of kids repeating a grade go down.



Yet 1 in 6 children in Minnesota experiences food insecurity.



This means they don't get enough food on a regular basis. Yes, families can apply to the Free and Reduced Price School Meal program, which provides no-cost meals to those who qualify.



But 1 in 4 food-insecure kids comes from a household that doesn't qualify for support.

This leaves out many families struggling to make ends meet.

Even families that do qualify don't always use the program. For some the paperwork is simply too burdensome or difficult to complete. Busy, stressed, and working parents need an easier helping hand. And some kids who qualify fear the stigma around free meals and will go hungry to avoid it.

HOW SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL HELPS EVERYONE

When school meals are provided at no cost to all students, these hungry kids no longer fall through the cracks. They consistently get nutritious food that sustains their energy and focus in the classroom.

And the benefits don't stop there. So many others stand to gain when school meals are free for all.



Working families – Families will no longer need to meet rigid low-income guidelines in order to access free meals. Those who struggle to pay for groceries and school meals can use that money for other essential expenses.

All students – Not only will hungry kids be fed, but when all students have equal access to the same meal, we take the sting out of food stigma. More students will feel less shame about school meals – and won't hesitate to get the food they need.

School nutritionists – Staff can focus on feeding kids well instead of collecting payments—reducing the administrative burden and making meal service more efficient.

Now's the time to pass HF1729



Since mid-2020, federal pandemic aid has allowed all public schools to provide school meals to all students at no cost. This has been invaluable in helping schools and families feed kids through the upheavals of shutdowns, remote schooling, employment uncertainty, and isolation periods. But this aid is set to expire at the end of the school year in 2022 – in just a few months. If we don't act now to pass HF1729 and make school meals for all permanent, more than half a million kids in Minnesota will lose crucial access to meals and slide back into hunger.

LEARN ABOUT THE HUNGER-FREE SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN

Endorsing partners include Allina Health, American Diabetes Association, Appetite for Change, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Children's Minnesota, EdAllies, Education Minnesota, Every Meal, Food Research and Action Center, General Mills, Hunger Solutions Minnesota, MAZON, Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, Minnesota School Social Workers Association, Second Harvest Heartland, Share Our Strength, The Food Group, Twin Cities Medical Society and Youthprise.

For more information contact Leah Gardner, lgardner@hungersolutions.org, 651-789-9850



March 29, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

General Mills supports HF 1729 which provides no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students, and encourages its passage this session.

We have been involved in community efforts to address hunger and food insecurity in Minnesota and across the U.S. for decades. Through this work we have seen the clear importance of ensuring that every child starts and gets through their school day well-nourished and ready to learn. School meal programs that enable every child to access nutritious meals each school day are a proven way to strengthen food security among school-aged children.

Our [companywide commitment to advancing racial equity](#) compels us to act and lend our voice especially to the farmers, communities and consumers we serve, many of whom also participate in and support school nutrition programs. We believe that children and families should have equitable access to the food and nutrition that they need and prefer, and that one's place, race and income should not be a predictor of one's life outcomes nor impact one's ability to be food secure. Passage of Hunger-Free schools has the potential to dramatically reduce structural and institutional inequities and destigmatize the utilization of school meals for all Minnesota students. As a founding member of the Minnesota Business Coalition for Racial Equity, General Mills strongly supports this proposal from the perspective of advancing racial equity.

Most of Minnesota's workforce is homegrown. As such, today's students will comprise the majority of Minnesota's future workforce and a sizeable portion of our company's workforce as well. As young learners, they need consistent access to nutritious food to thrive in school. Current programs such as free and reduced price lunch address some of the need. But today, 1 in 4 food-insecure kids in Minnesota comes from a household with an income that disqualifies them from free or reduced-cost school meals. A broader approach also reduces the paperwork burden on parents and school districts.

With temporary Federal aid set to expire at the end of this school year, we urge your support for HF1729 so we can continue to ensure all children receive the nourishment they need to be successful in school.

Sincerely,



Lee Anderson



March 29, 2022
House Education Finance Committee

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Children's Minnesota, I am writing in support of HF1729 which provides no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students. By creating Hunger-Free Schools we can make Minnesota's education system more racially equitable and ensure that all students are supported in achieving their academic potential.

Children's Minnesota is the state's largest pediatric health care system. We serve an incredibly diverse patient population and 46 percent of our patients are insured through Medicaid. Because of the diversity of patients we see, we know the unique and varied challenges Minnesota children face. Many lack the basic supports they need to thrive, such as safe and stable housing, access to high quality childcare and adequate access to healthy food.

Proper nutrition is fundamental to every aspect of a child's health and wellbeing. Today, 1 in 6 Minnesota children is food-insecure, with Black and Latino families disproportionately impacted. Missing meals and experiencing hunger can impair a child's development and academic achievement. Studies have shown that children who experience food insecurity are more likely to struggle in school, have increased absenteeism and experience behavioral and mental health problems like anxiety and depression.

Temporary federal aid allowing no cost school meals for all is set to expire at the end of the school year. We need to ensure that students can continue accessing the food they need, when they need it so they can focus on learning, not hunger. We can do this by making sure they have continuous access to no cost breakfast and lunch in school.

At Children's Minnesota, our vision is to be every family's essential partner in raising healthier children. As the kid experts in our community, it is our goal to improve the health and wellbeing of kids in our state. We urge your support for HF1729 so we can continue to ensure all children receive the nourishment they need to be successful in school.

Sincerely,

Amanda Jansen, MPP
Director of Public Policy
Children's Minnesota

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota

P.O. Box 64560
St. Paul, MN 55164-0560
(651) 662-8000 / (800) 382-2000



Letter of Support for HF1729

March 29, 2022
Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, the state's largest health plan, co-chairs the Hunger-Free Schools coalition and stands in strong support of HF1729. Blue Cross has a long history of working to address public health issues in our state, and in 2020 declared racism as a public health crisis. This proposal is in strong alignment with that commitment and would make a significant impact on addressing racial and health inequities in our state.

Young people need consistent fuel and proper nutrition to thrive in school. But today, 1 in 6 Minnesota children is food-insecure – an unacceptably high rate of hunger. School meals are a critical source of nutrition for many children, helping them learn and be active in the short term, and thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in the long term. Additionally, as we have experienced through the COVID 19 pandemic, a permanent Hunger-Free Schools solution would address episodic periods of food insecurity encountered or recent food insecurity issues from loss of employment or loss of a loved one who were the main financial providers.

With temporary Federal aid allowing school meals for all set to expire at the end of the school year, we urge your support for HF1729 so we can continue to ensure all children receive the nourishment they need to be successful in school. HF 1729 can help to ensure a healthier future for all and a more resilient Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Bukata Hayes

Vice President of Racial and Health Equity
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota



Connected for Life

March 29, 2022

Dear Chair Davnie and Education Finance Committee members,

On behalf of the American Diabetes Association (ADA) please accept my thanks for hearing House File 1729 (HF 1729) to create the healthy and hunger-free school program.

The ADA is extremely concerned with food insecurity as it is associated with higher rates of obesity and diabetes. People who experience food insecurity have a twofold risk of developing diabetes and we know from studies that food insecurity and going without meals can contribute to weight gain.¹ Obesity is a leading risk factor associated with type 2 diabetes, the most common form of the disease. Mitigating risk for diabetes is critical to our state's continued health and provision of universal meals to school children can greatly reduce food insecurity, related obesity, and diseases like diabetes for future generations of Minnesotans.

Ensuring access to school meals is also critical for children diagnosed with diabetes. Skipping meals can disrupt blood glucose levels and put individuals at higher risk of hypoglycemia. Additionally, if the meals are unhealthy an individual with diabetes may experience high blood glucose levels, which can increase the risk of long-term complications.²

Nearly 386,480 Minnesotans has diabetes and another 1.4 million have prediabetes and are at high-risk for developing the disease. The disease carries a terrible personal and economic burden. It is a leading cause of heart disease, stroke, kidney failure, blindness among adults, and amputation of the lower extremities. Preventing diabetes is critical to the health of future generations of Minnesotans

HF 1729 will allow our schools to serve free meals to all students as the negative economic stresses of the pandemic continue to impact Minnesota families in the years to come. We respectfully ask for the committee's support of this important legislation. The American Diabetes Association is pleased to offer our support for this legislation. If you have questions please don't hesitate to contact me at ckemp@diabetes.org.

Sincerely,

Carissa Kemp
Director of State Government Affairs

¹ See American Journal of Public Health, 102(3), 520-526. 49 Dammann, K. & Smith, C. (2010). *Food-related attitudes and behaviors at home, school, and restaurants: perspectives from racially diverse, urban, low-income 9- to 13-year-old children in Minnesota*.

See also Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 42(6), 389-397. 50 Olson, C. M., Bove, C. F., & Miller, E. O. (2007). *Growing up poor: long-term implications for eating patterns and body weight*. *Appetite*, 49(1), 198-207.

² See American Diabetes Association, *Food Insecurity and Diabetes*



EVERY MEAL

FIGHTING CHILD HUNGER

March 29, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Every Meal (formerly The Sheridan Story), I am writing in support of HF 1729, which provides no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students.

Every Meal serves children with food for the weekend in over 500 Minnesota schools and 40 school districts. I have heard over and over from school Principals, Assistant Principals, social workers, counselors, and teachers that one of the biggest barriers the students face to learning is that they are hungry. The simple fact is that if a child is hungry, they aren't going to be able to learn.

HF 1729 solves the in-school hunger problem. Every child in Minnesota would be nourished and ready to learn when they sit down at their desks. 1 in 6 Minnesota children is food-insecure, and we must ensure they are able to learn when in the classroom. This is the opportunity you have before you.

Your vote is a vote for the children in Minnesota. For the future of Minnesota. Please support HF 1729 for the children and their futures.

Sincerely,

Rob Williams

Founder & President
Every Meal



March 25, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members:

On behalf of the team at Second Harvest Heartland, our region's largest food bank, I am writing to urge you to support HF1729 provide free, nutritious school meals to all Minnesota students. We cannot solve hunger through food distributions alone, so we must fully leverage federal nutrition programs, like the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, to fully support Minnesota kids in need.

School meals are a critical source of nutrition for many children, helping them learn and be active in the short term, and thrive academically, physically, and emotionally in the long term. School meals establish lifelong healthy eating habits that can reduce the onset and severity of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, along with the cost associated with these diseases. School meals can account for over half of a child's daily calories, supporting kids who might not otherwise have reliable access to healthy food at home.

Yet too many students facing food insecurity do not realize the many benefits of receiving meals at school. More than a quarter of the nearly 200,000 Minnesota kids experiencing food insecurity live in households with incomes too high to qualify for free school meals. Pre-pandemic meal participation data from the Minnesota Department of Education also shows us that even among families who are eligible for free meals, over twenty percent, or more than 70,000 kids, do not participate due to stigma, administrative barriers, and other challenges.

HF1729 would allow all districts to offer breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge, reducing child hunger and making school meals more efficient. Not only will this legislation boost school meal participation and end lunch shaming, but it will also reduce administrative burden, eliminate unpaid lunch debt, and maximize federal resources.

With temporary Federal aid allowing school meals for all set to expire at the end of the school year, we urge your support for HF1729 so we can continue to ensure all children receive the nourishment they need to be successful in school. Thank you for your consideration and commitment to Minnesota's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allison O'Toole".

Allison O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer
Second Harvest Heartland

2HARVEST.ORG

651-484-5117 | 888-339-3663

7101 WINNETKA AVE. N., BROOKLYN PARK, MN 55428

MEMBER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**

Steven Krikava

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27 March 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Chair Davnie and Committee Members:

I am writing in support of HF 1729, a bill to provide no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students. School children in our state urgently need the assurance that they will continue to have access to healthy meals during the school day. And our state has the resources available to provide that assurance.

The COVID pandemic revealed just how vulnerable households are to unexpected disruptions. Families suddenly found themselves needing help to put food on the table. Many never would have imagined that it could happen to them. The federal government stepped in with a temporary provision for free school meals. The experience during the pandemic showed that no cost school meals can be done on a broad basis. Students reaped the benefit, regardless of their financial situation at home.

I serve on the board of two anti-hunger organizations – Mazon: A Jewish Response to Hunger and Hunger Solutions of Minnesota. Through my experiences on these boards, I've seen how important school meals are to assure that students have the 'fuel' they need to learn and how important school meals are to preventing childhood hunger.

I urge you to support HF1729 so we can continue to ensure all children receive the nourishment they need to be successful in school.

Sincerely,





March 29, 2022

Chair Davnie

443 State Office Building

St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Support for HF1729

Dear Chair Davnie and members of the Committee,

I am writing to support HF 1729 to provide continuing access to universal school meals in Minnesota schools. This will allow every child to have breakfast and lunch at no cost to schools or families. EdAllies is a proud endorsing partner of the Hunger Free Schools coalition working to guarantee that every student in Minnesota can count on having nutritious meals at school with no barriers.

Two years ago, our country and our state faced a pandemic that disrupted life and schooling for everyone. We made a collective decision as a society at that point to provide meals to all students who needed them regardless of their family's income, no questions asked. The federal waivers that have provided this critical access for the last three school years will expire in June.

We do not need to return to a system that was not working for families or students.

1 in 4 food-insecure kids in Minnesota comes from a household with an income that disqualifies them from free or reduced-cost school meals. By providing access to universal meals like we provide access to transportation, desks, electricity, and drinking fountains, we can ensure that no child will go hungry in our schools ever again.

According to research published by the Brookings Institute in 2021, schools providing access to universal meals raised achievement and decreased suspensions for students who would not have otherwise had access to subsidized meals.¹

We urge your support for HF 1729 which would bring millions of dollars in additional federal resources to Minnesota by having all eligible schools utilize the community eligibility provision to help offset part of the cost of universal meals.

Thank you to Rep. Jordan for your leadership on this issue and to the committee for your commitment to Minnesota's children.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Shaver".

Matt Shaver, Policy Director

¹<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/02/11/schoolwide-free-meal-programs-fuel-better-classroom-outcomes-for-students/>



March 29, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Members of the Committee,

The Legal Services Advocacy Project (LSAP) appreciates the opportunity to provide written public testimony in support of HF1729 which provides no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students. LSAP is a statewide division of Legal Aid, providing policy advocacy on issues affecting low-wealth Minnesotans, children, seniors, and Minnesotans with disabilities in legislative and administrative forums.

Legal Aid has engaged in healthy meal access advocacy for 15 years. We have advocated for expansions of free school lunch and breakfast and an end to lunch shaming practices. We stay immersed in this work because 1 in 4 food-insecure children in Minnesota live in a household that is not eligible for free school meals, and hunger is a barrier to children's health and education.

Legal Aid applauded the creation of the federal Community Eligibility Provision to allow high poverty schools and districts to offer free breakfast and free lunch to every student in a participating school. Further, we welcomed universal free school meals for all children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Universal free school meals guarantee a nutritious meal to every child, remove administrative complexities for school staff, and eliminate the stigma that comes with an inability to pay. Universal free school meals are a textbook example of a policy practice that promotes income and race equity within a school.

With the forthcoming expiration of temporary federal aid that allows free school meal access across Minnesota, we urge your support of HF1729 to continue this critical practice.

We appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "d. h.", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Staff Attorney
Legal Services Advocacy Project



✉ Info@youthprise.org ☎ 612 564 4858

March 29, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

Providing no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students is one of the best things we can do to achieve Youthprise's vision of a Minnesota where outcomes for youth are no longer predictable by race, geography, or socioeconomic status. That's why I'm writing today in support of HF 1729.

Our organization knows the importance of childhood nutrition well. We serve over one million meals and snacks each year to Minnesota youth during afterschool and summer programming. While our focus is on ensuring students have the nutrition they need in the out-of-school time, we know that many go hungry during the school day.

By creating Hunger-Free Schools, we can:

- ensure that all students are supported in achieving their academic potential
- guarantee that all students have access to stigma-free nutritious food while they are developing lifelong eating habits
- eliminate hunger in Minnesota classrooms while reducing the paperwork strain for schools and families.

One of our top priorities at Youthprise is the health and safety of our state's young people. We know they need consistent fuel and proper nutrition to thrive in school. Many people believe the existing Free and Reduced Lunch program covers all students in need. But today, 1 in 4 food-insecure kids in Minnesota comes from a household with an income that disqualifies them from free or reduced-cost school meals.

There is urgency to act now. Temporary Federal aid allowing school meals for all will expire at the end of the school year. Please support for HF 1729 so we can continue to ensure all children receive the nourishment they need to be successful in school.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marcus Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marcus Pope
President



March 15th, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of Hunger Solutions Minnesota, I am writing today to express support of HF 1729, which would provide no cost breakfast and lunch to all students in Minnesota. By ensuring that all schools in our state are Hunger-Free Schools, we can eliminate hunger in Minnesota’s classrooms; eliminate stigma from the lunchroom; and reduce the paperwork strain that burdens Minnesotan families and schools.

In Minnesota, 1 in 6 kids is facing food insecurity. That’s unacceptable for a state who prides itself on being one of the best states in the nation for raising a family. We must do better. Studies show that school meal participation lessens the achievement gap and allows students to focus on what really matters when they’re at school – learning.

When the Federal aid allowing all schools to provide meals to all students expires at the end of this school year, over 500,000 kids will lose access to meals that are crucial to their success. We urge you to support HF 1729, so we can continue to ensure that kids in Minnesota are feeding their minds, and in turn, the future of our state.

Sincerely,

Colleen Moriarty
Executive Director
Hunger Solutions Minnesota



March 29, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

No Kid Hungry Minnesota is pleased to support HF 1729 which would provide no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students.

No Kid Hungry Minnesota is a campaign of national anti-hunger organization Share Our Strength. Our campaign works with partners – lawmakers, educators, business leaders and nonprofits – to identify and eliminate the barriers that may prevent children and families from accessing healthy and nutritious meals. Passage of HF 1729 represents an important step toward achieving this goal.

1 in 6 children in Minnesota were estimated to have faced hunger last year, undoing more than a decade of progress in ending childhood hunger. The national hunger crisis is hitting communities of color the hardest, with Black and Latino families with children reporting food insecurity twice as often as white households. While the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken steps to support access to meals during the pandemic, including allowing schools to serve meals at no charge to all students, these measures are currently set to expire on June 30, 2022. This will mean the end of a critical nutritional resource for children and families as they continue to experience economic hardship.

Schools and essential nutrition service workers have proven themselves to be trusted community lifelines for students and families. HF 1729 expands access to school meals by requiring schools to provide school lunch and school breakfast at no cost for all their students. This legislation ensures that the state utilizes the federal Community Eligibility Program to the maximum extent possible, and that the Minnesota Department of Education supports and coordinates efficiently with Local Education Agencies to improve students' participation in school meal programs, including through offering school breakfast after the bell. Importantly, it supports equity in the classroom ensuring that every child has the nutrition they need to excel.

Aside from the immediate need to reduce child hunger, a body of evidence shows that adequate nutrition benefits child development, behavior, the ability to learn, and the creation of lifelong healthy habits. HF 1729 will ensure that Minnesota's K-12 students have the nutrition they need to learn and thrive.

HF 1729 would improve access to nutritious meals, improve the school academic environment, and help address child hunger, particularly among low-income families. Therefore, we are pleased to support HF 1729 and urge committee members to vote "yes" when this bill is before them.

Sincerely,

Bernadette Downey
Associate Director, Government Relations & Advocacy
Share Our Strength



2355 Fairview Ave #139, Roseville, MN 55113
www.metrodoctors.com | 612-623-2885

The mission of the Twin Cities Medical Society is to connect, represent, and engage physicians in improving the practice of medicine, policy development and public health initiatives.

March 25th, 2022

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Twin Cities Medical Society. The Twin Cities Medical Society is an organization that represents approximately 4,500 physicians and medical students living and working in the seven-county Twin Cities metropolitan area. I am writing in support of HF1729, which provides no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students.

One in six Minnesota children is facing food insecurity, meaning they are without reliable access to affordable, nutritious, and plentiful food. While hunger is something no Minnesotan should face, ensuring quality nutrition for school-aged children is of great importance, and funding of vital nutrition for children is something we should all be able to agree on. This time in a person's life is critical for brain development, which can only occur if a person, and their brain, are properly fed. Thanks to the massive budgetary surplus, the spending of which is at the discretion of legislators, addressing hunger in schools and ensuring that proper nutrition for current and future generations be provided should no longer be an issue.

Young people need consistent and quality nutrition to thrive in schools. The great opportunity to create Hunger-Free Schools will ensure that all students have access to stigma-free nutritious options during this critical period when they are developing habits they will carry forward throughout their lifetime. Ensuring that all students are supported in achieving their academic potential involves removing stigma and reducing the strain of bureaucratic hurdles to accessing nutrition.

With the temporary Federal aid which allowed for access to universal school meals set to expire at the end of the school year, I urge you to support HF1729 so we can continue to ensure all children receive the nourishment they need to be successful in school and throughout their lives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Zeke McKinney", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Zeke McKinney, MD, MHI, MPH

March 29, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Food Research & Action Center, the leading national nonprofit organization working to eradicate poverty-related hunger and undernutrition in the United States, I am writing in support of HF 1729. This bill will provide free healthy school meals to all Minnesota students.

We support this legislation because **schools have an important role to play in ending childhood hunger in America.** The National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program are the two largest child nutrition programs in the United States, offering two nutritious meals to children each school day, and the majority of students who participate are from low-income households.

The School Nutrition Programs improve health and support academic achievement. School meals serve as both a nutritional support and an educational support because hungry children do not have the focus and energy to learn or get the most out of their school day. There is a strong body of research that links participation in school meals to positive educational and health outcomes for our nation's children. School breakfast reduces the number of visits to the school nurse in the morning, [improves students' mental health](#), and reduces behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression. Additionally, students who eat breakfast at school [perform better on standardized tests](#) than those who skip breakfast or eat breakfast at home, and have improved scores in spelling, reading, and math. The positive impacts of participating in school meals are long lasting, supporting long-term overall educational attainment among students participating in school meals.

Current school nutrition programs do not go far enough because not all children whose families struggle qualify for free and reduced-price meals. Before the pandemic, only students whose family income was 130 percent of the federal poverty line or below qualified for free school meals. This translates into an annual income of less than \$35,000 for a family of four for the 2021–2022 school year.¹ The livable salary for a family of four² in the U.S. back in 2019 was nearly \$69,000.³ That does not take into account regional differences in the cost of living. This discrepancy between eligibility and the living wage means that many families who are struggling to make ends meet do not qualify for free (or even reduced-price) school meals. The pandemic highlighted what

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service. (2021). Child Nutrition Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines. Available at: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-03-04/pdf/2021-04452.pdf>. Accessed on June 13, 2021.

² The measure assumes two working parents and two children in the household.

³ Massachusetts Institute of Technology. (2020). Living Wage Calculator. Available at: <https://livingwage.mit.edu/articles/61-new-living-wage-data-for-now-available-on-the-tool>. Accessed on June 11, 2021.

anti-hunger and education advocates already knew; there are many students that need a nutritious breakfast and lunch at school who don't qualify for free or reduced-price school meals.

Schools have been able to serve all student at no cost during the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic brought increased attention to the unacceptably high number of American families that struggle with food insecurity and the families that joined those ranks when the pandemic hit. Black and Latinx households have been particularly hard hit by the pandemic and it will take years for struggling families to recover from this public health and economic crisis. Through waivers from USDA, many schools have been able to serve free school meals to all their students during COVID-19, allowing them to get the most out of their virtual or in-person learning and supporting food security and nutrition.

All students should permanently receive free healthy school meals. Building back from the pandemic gives us an opportunity to reimagine the way school meal programs operate. Serving school meals to all students at no cost would be a gamechanger for students, families and schools, supporting students' education and health and improving school nutrition finances and operations.

Serving all students eliminates the stigma associated with school meals and will put an end to school meal debt. Offering free and reduced-price meals only to students from low-income households can create a stigma and reduce participation. By providing every student the opportunity to participate in school meals, the stigma some children, particularly older students, fear of being labeled low-income by their classmates is eliminated. Free meals for all students eliminate school meal debt, which has been a problem for many families and schools under a tiered payment system.

Perhaps most importantly, at a time when our country is critically examining how to end racial disparities, **Healthy School Meals for All can help advance equity.** Healthy School Meals for All would help reduce racial disparities in health and education for Black, Latinx and Indigenous children, who experience hunger at disproportionate rates and face systemic barriers to food access both at school and in their communities. Providing school meals to all students is also critical for advancing racial equity and justice, as it would ensure that Black, Indigenous and Latinx students are able to access the key nutrition they need to thrive in the classroom and beyond.

With temporary Federal aid allowing school meals for all set to expire at the end of the school year, we urge your support for HF1729 so we can continue to ensure all children receive the nourishment they need to be successful in school.

Sincerely,

Alexis Bylander
Senior Child Nutrition Policy Analyst
Food Research & Action Center



Minnesota Business
Coalition for
Racial Equity

March 25, 2022

Minnesota House of Representatives
Education Finance Committee
443 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Davnie and Committee Members,

The Minnesota Business Coalition for Racial Equity (MBCRE) urges you to support HF1729 to provide no cost breakfast and lunch to all Minnesota students. Today, 1 in 6 Minnesota children is food-insecure, with Black and Latino families disproportionately impacted. Free school meals help students of color more, so it is an essential step in making Minnesota's education system more racially equitable.

MBCRE was formed by business leaders to address the systemic inequities that have impacted Black Minnesotans for too long. The coalition is comprised of more than 70 businesses that have come together to build a more just and prosperous state with and for Black Minnesotans. Our goal is to eliminate the systemic barriers that prevent positive economic outcomes for Black Minnesotans. A more racially equitable education system, that includes Black students who are equipped to reach their full potential, is critical to the economic vitality of our state.

By creating Hunger-Free Schools, we can ensure that young people receive the consistent fuel and proper nutrition required to reach their full potential. Well-nourished children are more engaged in the classroom, contributing to improved cognitive function and longer attention spans. Therefore, providing free school meals to all students in Minnesota serves our youth in their educational pursuits and would have a tremendous impact on reducing racial inequities.

We urge your support for HF1729 so we can continue to ensure all children receive the nutrition they need to be successful in school.

Thank you,

Tiffani Daniels
Managing Director
Minnesota Business Coalition for Racial Equity



Minnesota Business
Coalition for
Racial Equity

Minnesota Business Coalition for Racial Equity Member List

3M
Accenture
Allianz Life
Allina Health
Andersen Corporation
APi Group
Apogee Enterprises, Inc.
Bank of America
Best Buy
Be the Match
Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Minnesota
Boston Scientific
Bremer Bank
C.H. Robinson
Cargill
Caribou Coffee
Carlson
Center for Economic Inclusion
Children's Minnesota
CHS
Comcast
Cummins Inc.
Delta Air Lines
Delta Dental of Minnesota

Ecolab
Element Fleet Management
Fairview Health Services
General Mills
Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare
Great Clips
Greater Twin Cities United Way
GREATER MSP
Greenlight Fund Twin Cities
Hope Community
JPMorgan Chase
Land O'Lakes
Medtronic Foundation
Minnesota Business Partnership
Minnesota Twins
Mortenson
nVent
The Opus Group

PNC Bank
Polaris

Post
Red Wing Shoe Company
Ryan Companies
Sankore Consulting
Science Museum of Minnesota
Securian
Sleep Number
Target
The Toro Company
Thomson Reuters
Thrivent
Travelers
Twin Cities Habitat for Humanity
Twin Metals
U.S. Bank
UnitedHealth Group
University of St. Thomas
Winnebago
Wells Fargo
Xcel Energy
Youthprise