



SUMMARY

The state's 2007-2009 budget includes \$3.6 million to eliminate the 40-cent co-pay for School Lunch in kindergarten through the third grade—getting rid of a proven barrier to participation in school meals. A minimum of 2,400 additional low-income students will start eating school lunch, getting the nutrition they need to achieve in school. This investment is a solid step toward eliminating the school lunch co-pay for all students.



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Resources

[Food Stamp Erosion in Washington \(pdf\)](#)

[Websites, resources and articles we've bookmarked](#)

[Media coverage of hunger issues in Washington](#)

BACKGROUND

Hunger continues to play a role in limiting student educational success in Washington. A [U.S. Census Bureau report](#) recently provided updated statistics on the number of school-aged children living in families with incomes below the federal poverty level (\$19,350 for a family of four). More than 140,000 school-aged children fall within this category in Washington. While we don't know the exact number of these children that are going hungry, we do know that extreme poverty severely taxes a family's ability to afford such basic necessities as food and heat.

School nutrition programs are among the most effective federal programs ever created to counter childhood hunger. Yet even among Washington school districts with high rates of child poverty, few districts provide all of the nutritional opportunities they could. Of 79 school districts with high child poverty, only one quarter offer School Lunch, School Breakfast

and After-School Snacks in all of the district's schools.

In 2006, a coalition of organizations including the Children's Alliance, the Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition, the Washington School Nutrition Association and the Lutheran Public Policy Office succeeded in securing \$2 million in the state budget to help school districts fund the School Breakfast Program and eliminate the reduced-price "co-pay" some low-income children had to pay for breakfast. That fall, [school breakfast participation](#) by low-income children shot up 40% statewide. In some school districts the increase was far higher: 90% for Seattle, 53% for Spokane and over 120% in Olympia.

Building on this success, anti-hunger advocates went into the [2007 legislative session](#) with the goal

of eliminating the reduced-price "co-pay" for the School Lunch Program in Washington.

 [Join the Children's Action Network](#)

 [Read our News Blog](#)

As long as I'm in the Senate, I'll continue to do everything I can to feed hungry kids. Not to do so is irresponsible and inhumane.

– Senator Margarita Prentice, D-Renton

WHAT HAPPENED

Advocates agreed prior to session that the dramatic surge in breakfast participation demonstrated that the per-meal co-pay of 30 cents for breakfast and 40 cents for lunch was indeed a formidable barrier to participation by low-income children. Along with efforts to insure the breakfast funds were retained and increased, the Children's Alliance and its partners requested \$10 million to eliminate the co-pay for school lunch.

Legislative champions enlisted early on included Rep. Joe McDermott (D-West Seattle), a key supporter of the breakfast proposal, and Sen. Craig Pridemore (D-Vancouver) and Sen. Phil Rockefeller (D-Kitsap/Bainbridge Island). Sen. Margarita Prentice (D-Renton), chair of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, also was an early ally.

In January, an [editorial column](#) ran in the Seattle Times criticizing the breakfast investment passed the year before. The attack actually gave the lunch campaign a boost: the paper published six letters to the editor outlining the benefits of increased access to nutrition programs in school, including [letters from Rep. McDermott](#) and [Sen. Prentice](#).

Neither the Governor's budget nor the House budget included funding for the lunch co-pay proposal. The school lunch campaign was saved by children's advocates across the state. The school lunch alerts sent to our Children's Action Network were among the most successful of the session, with anti-hunger advocates stepping up to send hundreds of letters to their legislators every time an alert was sent, urging their

lawmakers to include funding to eliminate the school lunch co-pay.

The Senate budget—the last to come out—did include \$3.6 million to eliminate the co-pay for students in kindergarten through third grade, and this level of investment was included in the final budget. Despite falling short of our goal of \$10 million, this initial investment is a solid step toward eliminating the school lunch co-pay for all students.

NEXT STEPS

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is working on a plan for implementing this budget provision. There are two major concerns: First, parents may be confused by having the co-pay eliminated only for K-3 and not for other grades; secondly, some school districts may need to change how they record and report meal participation to OSPI in order to receive the added funds.

On the plus side, elimination of the breakfast co-pay has increased participation not only by children who no longer need to pay 30 cents per breakfast, but also by students in the free and full-price meal categories. A similar boost in lunch participation—even only in K-3—will make school nutrition programs

more cost-effective and will help students arrive in the classroom ready to learn.



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"When my son was a baby we went through some hard times and without things like food stamps we never would have made it."

– Tracy Tiwebemal, 1 of the top 10 Children's Action Network advocates



If you're reading a printout of this End of Session Report, here are some of the links that are embedded throughout:

Main Links

Children's Alliance -
<http://childrensalliance.org>

Join the Children's Action Network -
<http://www.childrenshub.org/calliance/join.html>

News blog -
<http://childrensalliance.typepad.com/news/>

Health Coverage for Every Child

Plain language summary of Washington's Cover All Kids law -
http://childrensalliance.org/4Download/health/cover_all_children_summary.pdf

Websites, resources and articles we've bookmarked -
<http://del.icio.us/childrensalliance/health>

Media coverage of children's health in Washington -
<http://childrensalliance.newsvine.com/health>

Quality and Funding for Early Learning

Summary of early learning investments in the final state budget 2007 - 2009 -
http://childrensalliance.org/4Download/earlylearning/summary_chart.pdf

Media coverage of early learning in Washington -
<http://childrensalliance.newsvine.com/early-learning>



Pictures from our events -
<http://flickr.com/photos/childrensalliance/sets/>



Video from our events -
<http://youtube.com/childrensalliance>

Improving Foster Care for All Children

Congressional report on inequity in the child welfare system -
<http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d07816.pdf>

Mockingbird Society -
<http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org/>

Michigan State's Child Equity Report -
http://www.michigan.gov/documents/DHS-Child-Equity-Report_153952_7.pdf

More "Brain Fuel" for Hungry Children

Food Stamp Erosion in Washington -
http://childrensalliance.org/4Download/hunger/wa_erosion_rpt.pdf

Websites, resources and articles we've bookmarked -
<http://del.icio.us/childrensalliance/hunger>

Media coverage of hunger issues in Washington -
<http://childrensalliance.newsvine.com/hunger>



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