

Universal Free Student Meals

During the 2020-21 and 2021-22 school years, federal waivers provided all schoolchildren with free breakfast and lunch. This allowed school districts to streamline their operations, expand the number of students fed during the school day, and eliminate stigma for children from low-income families.

The expiration of federal waivers resulted in more than 726,000 students in nearly 2,000 schools across the state losing access to free school meals. Regular eligibility requirements for free student meals are restrictive: families of four with incomes of no more than \$51,400.

The end of this initiative has also led to mounting deficits in school district nutrition programs as many families, now accustomed to free meals, have not made expected payments on their children's behalf.

School leaders in every corner of the state and every type of district have supported this initiative. Even in wealthier school districts, offering free meals to all student regardless of family income has reduced stigma and promoted a positive learning environment.

The Council urges the Legislature to provide state funding to restore universal free student meals.