

Submitter: Kim Leung
On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Education
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3435

When post COVID meal waivers went away, one of our high school students did not qualify for free/reduced meals. The parents received the notification for the unpaid meal charges and told this student he needed to pay for the meals himself. This student is working to pay for his own gas, etc. and now has to cover his lunch debt. He tells our staff he is hungry, but doesn't have money to pay for meals and doesn't want his parents to know that he is hungry or that he ate anything.... This is one of many examples we've had the year 22-23. Sometimes names are taken down and shared with our family partnership advocates, other times, the student runs away and we aren't able to get the name to pass on.

We've had students take meals, ask if it costs money, then throw away the food or put it down and run away because they don't want to be charged. We've had parents ask us to put limits on their student's account and the student comes up to us asking for food because they are hungry. We've had families who do not qualify, but are in impossibly difficult situations where medical bills are high, cost of living is high, and they are unable to afford the cost of a school meal. There are waiting lists with various food resources in the area that we currently have.

Without the increase in reimbursement rates, it's nearly impossible to stay "self-sustaining" . The cost of containers went from \$0.10, maybe \$0.20 on the higher end to over \$0.80!!! That is just containers. How is the reimbursement rate less than 1 gallon of gas in some states? It's less than the cost of a medium latte and we expect to feed our students a nutritious meal + provide a living wage to staff. I would ask any of the congressman or congresswoman if they have ever bought a lunch that is the same amount as the reimbursement rate. We are forced to make difficult decisions and cut back on local, fresh, quality nutrition which will impact learning. Hungry kids can't learn, and not all food is created the same. We want to nourish our kids so they CAN learn best and not only be effective citizens and contributing members of our society, but we want to contribute to building healthier communities. The funds they do not put towards the front end in building healthier habits will end up costing more on the back end with more diet-related diseases and hospital bills later on.