

RESOLUTION:

LWPTSA Council Advocacy for Free School Meals and Ending School Lunch Debt

Presented to LWPTSA Council Board members

Whereas, beginning in the 2022–23 school year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s pandemic-era universal free school meals waiver ended, and schools have returned to normal operations, requiring families to apply for benefits and charging students who do not qualify for free meals;

Whereas, the most recent USDA study found that 1 in 6 households with children struggled to buy enough food for their families in 2021, highlighting a continued need for support;

Whereas, universal free meals reduce the resources expended by school districts on tracking and collecting meal debts, with significant time spent contacting families and collecting unpaid charges, which contributes to negative interactions between families and schools;

Whereas, school districts offering universal free meals through state initiatives or the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) have experienced positive outcomes, including decreased stigma for low-income students, increased participation in school meal programs, and operational efficiencies, while 92.8% of schools charging for meals report challenges with unpaid meal debt after the pandemic waivers ended;

Whereas, research shows that access to healthy, consistent meals improves children’s academic performance, enhances memory and learning, and decreases illness, leading to better attendance and long-term health benefits;

Whereas, 63% of voters nationwide support legislation that would make free school meals available to all students, reflecting widespread public approval for this initiative;

Whereas, legislative efforts have begun in Washington state to address this issue, including HB 2058, which did not pass committee in 2024, but is supported by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and advocacy groups including United Way of King County and Northwest Harvest;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Lake Washington PTSA Council supports advocating for legislation or policies that increase student access to free meals served at public schools by:

- Providing funding for universal free school meals for students;
- Eliminating school meal debt;
- Reducing the requirements for tracking or qualifying students for free meals.

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Resources:

- (1) [OSPI - Ensuring All Students Have Access to School Meals Statewide](#)
- (2) [USDA Report on Food Insecurity Among Children](#)
- (3) [School Nutrition Association 2024 Position Paper](#)
- (4) [Campaign for Children Issue Brief: Universal School Meals](#)
- (5) [Food Research & Action Center - Healthy School Meals for All](#)
- (6) [United Way of King County - Free School Meals for All Washington Students](#)
- (7) [Northwest Harvest - Advocacy and Legislative Priorities](#)