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Gov. Evers: Highlights “Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids” budget initiative

Posted on Wednesday, Apr 26, 2023

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today highlighted his “Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids” initiative in his 2023-25 biennial budget proposal to provide universal free breakfast and lunch for kids at school and engage local farmers and producers in the school meal marketplace.

“A kid who’s hungry isn’t going to be able to focus on their coursework or engage meaningfully in the classroom, so if we want to improve outcomes for our kids, then we have to shorten the odds,” said Gov. Evers. “Our ‘Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids’ program would cost the average taxpayer just a little over $1 per week to ensure our kids aren’t hungry at school and can focus on their studies and not on whether or when they’ll eat next. This is a critical investment we have to make to do what’s best for our kids.”

The School Nutrition Association of Wisconsin reports that alleviating school-age hunger is foundational to academic achievement, cognitive and physical development, social and behavioral response skills, workforce preparedness, and overall health and wellness, yet according to Feeding America, one in eight kids faces hunger in Wisconsin.

Part of Gov. Evers’ historic $2.6 billion overall increase for K-12 schools, the governor’s budget proposal creates the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids program, to improve student health and reduce hunger by fully funding school breakfast and lunch for all kids with a more than $120 million investment. The School Nutrition Association estimates that the average cost of lunch for an elementary school student is $2.75 per day and $3 per day for middle and high school students,

meaning families are paying upwards of $13 or $15 per week per child. If enacted by the Wisconsin State Legislature, the State Budget Office estimates this new program would cost the average taxpayer just $54.96 a year, or approximately $1.05 a week, to make sure kids can eat and have healthy meals at school.

Further, Wisconsin schools currently receive just six cents from the state per breakfast even though state law requires a reimbursement rate of 15 cents if adequate funding is available. In addition to and regardless of the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids program, the governor's budget would provide $9 million to increase the school breakfast reimbursement rate to 15 cents per meal and extend the eligibility for independent charter schools and state residential schools.

Additionally, the governor is also proposing incentivizing schools to support Wisconsin farmers and producers by providing $2.75 million for an enhanced reimbursement rate for locally- sourced foods.

Details of the governor's Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids initiative are available below.

Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Creating the Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids program, an initiative aimed at improving student health and reducing hunger by investing more than $120 million in fiscal year (FY) 2024-25 to fully fund school breakfasts and lunches for all children; Providing $9 million to increase the school breakfast reimbursement rate to 15 cents per meal and extending eligibility for the reimbursement to independent charter schools and state residential schools operated by the Department of Public Instruction; and Incentivizing schools to support Wisconsin farmers, food producers, and local economies by providing $2.75 million in FY 2024-25 for an enhanced 10 cents reimbursement per meal for those including locally sourced foods.

An online version of this release is available here.