



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hunger Solutions Minnesota, eighteen partners, and state legislators all push for Minnesota schools to provide free healthy meals to all students

SAINT PAUL, MN: On Tuesday, March 16th, a coalition of eighteen organizations launched the Healthy Hunger-Free Schools campaign: a movement pushing for free school meals for all school students in Minnesota. The effort, on top of recent legislation focused on addressing child hunger in Minnesota (HF 1985 and SF 1902), all aim to ensure that all students are supported in reaching their academic potential by addressing food insecurity.

“Schools are critical in helping with the development of life-long eating habits to support the health of all children, independently of their socio-economic situation,” said Colleen Moriarty, Executive Director for Hunger Solutions Minnesota. “The Healthy Hunger-Free Schools program will help support Minnesota students and families by making it possible for all schools in the state to provide free meals to all students, a critical step in the mission to end hunger in Minnesota.”

The economic crisis sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic continues to push more Minnesota families and residents toward food insecurity and hunger. Last year, Minnesotans made more than 3.8 million visits to food shelves, an increase of nearly 13% over 2019’s record-breaking number of visits. Today, one in six children in Minnesota face food insecurity, and one in nine Minnesotans do not know where their next meal will come from. Black, Indigenous, and non-white families are all twice as likely to experience food insecurity than white families.

“Access to healthy foods is linked to life-long health, learning and social outcomes,” said Dr. Mark Steffen, Chief Medical Officer for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota. “When children and young adults have access to healthy food, they have a better chance of developing lasting healthy nutrition habits that can reduce their risk of developing chronic diseases. These nutrition habits at an early age can reduce health disparities, contribute to more equitable health outcomes and help make us a healthier state.”

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, school-aged children with severe hunger are nearly twice as likely to experience a chronic illness and demonstrated more internalizing behavior problems such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and difficulty concentrating than those not experiencing hunger. About 50% of mothers of children facing moderate to severe

hunger experience life-long posttraumatic stress disorder. Letting our kids go hungry has a massive, adverse impact on not only our youngest and most precious Minnesotans but also their families.

“Kids need to have something to eat so that they aren't thinking about how hungry they are and are better able to access their education,” said Heather Alden, a school social worker, past president and legislative member of the Minnesota School Social Workers Association (MSSWA). “It can be very hard to access learning on an empty stomach. Just some breakfast and lunch can turn around a kid's day from one where they aren't feeling well to one where they can engage in learning as their basic organic human needs are being cared for every day.”

To support this effort during this legislative session, bills HF 1985 and SF 1902, for Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) were introduced by Rep. Sydney Jordan and Sen. Duckworth in the House and Senate, respectively.

The coalition of partner organizations supporting the campaign includes Allina, American Diabetes Association, Appetite for Change, Blue Cross Blue Shield, Children's Minnesota, Ed Allies, Education Minnesota, Every Meal, Food Research and Action Center, General Mills, Hunger Solutions Minnesota, MAZON, Minnesota Legal Aid, Minnesota School Social Workers Association, Second Harvest Heartland, Share Our Strength, and The Food Group and YouthPrise.

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About Hunger Solutions Minnesota

Hunger Solutions Minnesota works to end hunger in our state. We take action to assure food security for all Minnesotans by supporting programs and agencies that provide food to those in need, advancing sound public policy, building grassroots advocacy and informing and educating critical stakeholders about the status of hunger in Minnesota.

A Facebook page was created for the campaign, which can be followed for updates at: [facebook.com/HHFSMinnesota](https://www.facebook.com/HHFSMinnesota). You can also find a webpage on the Hunger Solutions Minnesota's website: <https://www.hungersolutions.org/HHFSMinnesota>

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