

POLICY GOAL & RATIONALE

Increase utilization of school breakfast and enhance nutritional standards as strategies to decrease the risk of food insecurity and protect against childhood obesity.

The intertwined issues of obesity and hunger continue to be a major public health problem in our State. While all segments of the population are affected, low-income and food insecure people are especially vulnerable to obesity due to additional risk factors associated with poverty, including limited resources and poor access to healthy, local and affordable foods. Here in our state, 1 in 5 families with children are struggling with hunger and nearly one third of our young people are overweight or obese.

Despite continued gloomy economic prospects, there is no lack of low or no-cost policy and systems change opportunities in the childhood obesity prevention arena. The Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition is looking to support healthy, hunger-free kids – goals that each of us can unite around in our fight against childhood hunger and obesity. Increasing School Meal participation is a fundamental step in impacting the overall school nutrition environment. Join us on November 15th for an interactive summit, examining policy and advocacy solutions for building a healthier generation in Washington. [Click here to register for the Summit!](#)

“We also find that subsidized meals at school or day care are beneficial for children’s weight status, and we argue that expanding access to subsidized meals may be the most effective tool to use in combating obesity in poor children.”

Kimbro & Rigby, 2010

FOOD AND LEARNING

Nearly half of all students in Washington state qualify for free breakfast, yet very few actually take advantage. Those who miss it are missing out on more than a meal. Studies show that students who eat a healthy breakfast score higher on standardized tests, get better grades, and are more likely to be at a healthy weight. At a time when our state is in a long and severe recession, the School Breakfast Program is more indispensable than ever to maintain the health and well-being of low-income children and get them ready to learn. Increasing participation in the federal nutrition programs – including school breakfast – is a childhood obesity prevention strategy recommended by two recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) committees and the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity.¹ It's not just nutrition that is improved. By increasing the use of school meals, schools can qualify for federal money to help pay for the programs. Money that is critical considering the state is again contemplating severe budget cuts.

¹ The National Academies Press. Institute of Medicine. (2011). Early Childhood Obesity Prevention Policies. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity. (2010). Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity within a Generation. Available at: http://www.letsmove.gov/sites/letsmove.gov/files/TaskForce_on_Childhood_Obesity_May2010_FullReport.pdf

AT THE SUMMIT OUR PANELISTS WILL DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING INITIATIVES AND KEY POLICY SOLUTIONS TO INCREASING SCHOOL BREAKFAST ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION:

- The [Fuel Up First with Breakfast Challenge](#) is a partnership venture, including the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), The Washington State Dairy Council and Children’s Alliance. This effort supports schools that are ready to make System Changes around when kids eat and where kids eat, like shifting bus schedules to create more time for breakfast.
- The integration of the free and reduced priced school meals as a web-based application through [Washington Connection \(WCBP\)](#). The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), working in collaboration with community partners, government agencies, tribes, and local jurisdictions, and with the support of philanthropic organizations, has created the WCBP to improve residents’ access to services and benefits. This effort will provide each eligible household the ability to easily and securely apply for free and reduced price school meals, while increasing the direct certification process between OSPI and DSHS. Which currently only matches 72 percent of those receiving Basic Food/TANF against student enrollment.
- The fundamental role school meals play in supporting key components of the [Coordinated School Health](#) framework by improving the overall school nutrition environment throughout the entire day, including stronger efforts to purchase more local food and better standards for both regular meals as well as competitive food.
- The [Healthy Communities Partnership](#) (HCP) Steering Committee supports the growing movement for healthy breakfasts as a small, first step towards healthier eating and living. They strongly support a broad, public and private campaign for daily breakfast, at home, in school, away from home and at work. Most Steering Committee members and several significant community partners are willing to act within their own organizations to help. They include state and local government agencies, sports teams, food retailers, community health advocacy groups, higher education institutes and specialized nutritional education programs. HCP Steering Committee is now searching for a single entity that can lead and coordinate these efforts. Such cross-sector leadership can use these resources to amplify and sustain healthy breakfast messages long enough to improve chances of lasting change in community practices and supporting policies.

“Policymakers, public health professionals, researchers, and advocates are exploring a variety of solutions to the childhood obesity crisis, especially for low-income children. One viable solution – broadening participation in the federal nutrition programs as well as improving their quality – is often underemphasized.”

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