

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## EHB 1342

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As of March 22, 2021

**Title:** An act relating to eliminating lunch copays for students who qualify for reduced-price lunches.

**Brief Description:** Eliminating lunch copays for students who qualify for reduced-price lunches.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Berg, Gregerson, Berry, Wicks, Chopp, Valdez, Morgan, Sells, Fitzgibbon, Orwall, Santos, Ryu, Peterson, Rude, Maycumber, Shewmake, Stokesbary, Ormsby, Lovick, Stonier, Bergquist, Bateman, Lekanoff, Callan, Frame, Riccelli, Pollet and Harris-Talley.

**Brief History:** Passed House: 2/12/21, 95-1.

**Committee Activity:** Early Learning & K-12 Education: 3/10/21, 3/12/21 [DP-WM].  
Ways & Means: 3/22/21.

### Brief Summary of Bill

- Eliminates lunch co-pays for students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth- grade who qualify for reduced-price lunches.
- Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to allocate funding for this purpose.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair, K-12; Wilson, C., Vice Chair, Early Learning; Hawkins, Ranking Member; Dozier, Hunt, McCune, Mullet and Pedersen.

**Staff:** Ailey Kato (786-7434)

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

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## SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

**Staff:** Jeffrey Naas (786-7708)

**Background:** School breakfast and lunch programs are subsidized by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the state, and student co-pays based on family income. In order for students to qualify for free meals, their family's income must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty level. Students whose families have income between 130 percent and 185 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals. USDA requires a standard co-pay for reduced-price meals—\$0.30 for breakfast and \$0.40 for lunch.

For the period July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021, 130 percent of the poverty level is \$34,060 for a family of four and 185 percent is \$48,470. In Washington, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction reported 402,028 students, or 36 percent of public school students, qualified for free meals and 77,126 students, or 7 percent of public school students, qualified for reduced-price meals in October 2019.

In the operating budget, the Legislature has appropriated state funds for child nutrition programs, which includes eliminating breakfast co-pays for eligible public school students and lunch co-pays for eligible public school students in kindergarten through third- grade.

**Summary of Bill:** Beginning in the 2021-22 school year, school districts with school lunch programs must eliminate lunch co-pays for students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth-grade who qualify for reduced-price lunches. The Superintendent of Public Instruction must allocate funding for this purpose.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Early Learning & K-12 Education):** PRO: Hungry students do not learn as well as those who are fed. This bill eliminates co-payments for more students and is needed in this unprecedented health crisis, which has exacerbated food insecurity and increased child hunger. Hunger should not get in the way of recovery. While meals are being provided to students during COVID-19, meal participation has dropped. As schools get closer to reopening, meal programs can be reimagined and free meals can be provided to all low-income students. The \$0.40 co-pay adds up and is a barrier for families. Unpaid meal debt can negatively impact students. Currently, students who qualify for reduced price lunches in kindergarten through third-grade do not have a co-

pay. Eliminating co-pays for all students would provide parity and reduce confusion. This bill will help nutrition programs, which run on tight margins, continue serving healthy food.

**Persons Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education):** PRO: Representative April Berg, Prime Sponsor; Martha Rice, Washington State School Directors' Association and Yakima School Board; Bob Cooper, National Association of Social Workers—Washington Chapter; Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest; Claire Lane, Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition; Lauren McGowan, United Way of King County; Ben Atkinson, Auburn School District; Mitch Denning, Washington School Nutrition Association; Leeda Beha, Washington School Nutrition Association; Sandy Conradi, Washington School Nutrition Association Mikhail Cherniske, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Early Learning & K-12 Education):** No one.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony (Ways & Means):** PRO: Providing meal nutritional assistance is a great investment in our students. Students improve math performance and reading scores, have better attendance, and fewer nurse visits. Hunger among students is up nearly 10 percent during the COVID period. This reimbursement program is the most efficient way to deal with chronic child hunger. Families who are particularly struggling during the COVID period will have one less thing to worry about when their kids are at school. Many students at our district in fourth through twelfth grade cannot afford the \$0.40 reduced-price copay. This group makes up 86 percent of the meal debt within our district. Families have to pay the meal debt when the students leave the district or graduate which places a burden on families who cannot afford to pay the debt.

**Persons Testifying (Ways & Means):** PRO: Lorrell Noahr, Washington Education Association; Christina Wong, Northwest Harvest; Mitch Denning, Washington School Nutrition Association; Leeda Beha, Washington School Nutrition Association; Leanne Eko, OSPI Child Nutrition Services.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying (Ways & Means):** OTHER: Charice Meniccuci, Paschal Sherman Indian School.