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State superintendent proposes universal free meals for Wisconsin students

Dr. Jill Underly calls for \$294M investment to improve access to school meals at no cost to families

KENOSHA – As more Wisconsin students continue to struggle with food insecurity, State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly today proposed increasing access to meals at school by providing all Wisconsin students access to nutritious breakfast and lunch at no cost to families.

Joined by staff in the Kenosha Unified School District and education partners, Dr. Underly called for universal free meals as part of her 2025-27 Biennial Budget Request during a news conference. Dr. Underly's universal free meals proposal, totaling nearly \$294 million, expands access to nutritious school meals to all Wisconsin students.

One in four (25.4 percent) Wisconsin high school students reported hunger due to a lack of food in their home, [data from the 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Survey shows](#).

"Access to food is one of the most basic human needs, and yet many Wisconsin kids are telling us they don't know when – or if – they will have their next meal," Dr. Underly said. "When we make sure all our kids are properly nourished, we are nurturing the leaders of tomorrow. My budget proposal makes sure that every kid, no matter their background, has access to the nutrition they need to succeed at no cost."

Under the proposal, the DPI would create a new supplemental nutrition aid program offsetting costs to students and families for meals received while at school – both breakfast and lunch. The proposal is part of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's 2025-27 Biennial Budget request. In addition to the universal free meals proposal, Dr. Underly's 2025-27 Biennial Budget Request will:

- Fund the School Breakfast Program at a reimbursement rate of \$0.15 per meal and expand participation to include independent charter schools, the state's residential schools, and residential childcare centers (\$6.1 million over the biennium).

(more)

- Strengthen local food supply chains by creating a new program encouraging school districts to buy directly from local farmers and producers and incorporate fresh, high quality, locally grown foods into school meal and snack programs (\$10 million over the biennium).
- Fully fund the School Day Milk Program so more Wisconsin students have access to milk while at school (\$458,900 over the biennium).
- Create a new grant program to allow schools to purchase milk coolers or equipment to convert to bulk milk dispensers (\$150,000 over the biennium).

These nutrition provisions add up to an additional \$311 million in investment in nutrition for kids.

The DPI's budget request, to be released in full in November, will propose additional significant investments in K-12 public education. Earlier this week, [Dr. Underly proposed more than \\$304 million](#) to support Wisconsin youth mental health, and more information will be released in the coming weeks.

For more information on school nutrition, [visit the DPI's website](#).

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