
Education Committee

HB 2610

Brief Description: Creating the hunger-free students' bill of rights act.

Sponsors: Representatives Peterson, Bergquist, Pollet, Gregerson, Appleton, Valdez, Ryu, Jinkins, Macri, Tarleton, Hudgins, McBride, Doglio, Stonier, Fey, Goodman, Santos, Frame and Stanford.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires schools to provide a meal that qualifies for federal reimbursement to students requesting a meal regardless of the students' ability to pay.
- Prohibits schools and districts from publicly identifying or stigmatizing a student who cannot pay for a school meal.
- Requires local liaisons for homeless students to coordinate with the applicable school nutrition program to ensure that each homeless student has proper access to free school meals.

Hearing Date: 1/15/18

Staff: Katie Choate (786-7296) and Ethan Moreno (786-7386).

Background:

In the 2016 school year, 473,309 Washington students, or 43 percent, were enrolled in the free or reduced-meals special program. In the 2015 school year, the most recent available data, 39,671 Washington students or 3.7 percent were identified as homeless.

Federal School Nutrition Programs.

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) are child nutrition programs funded by the United States Department of Agriculture. In Washington, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) administers the program. The NSLP and the SBP are designed to promote the health and well-being of children by providing nutritionally balanced, low-cost or no-cost meals to children each school day. The NSLP and the

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SBP provides reimbursement for meals served that meet federal requirements. Public or nonprofit private schools and public or nonprofit private residential child care institutions may participate in the NSLP and the SBP.

Federal Reimbursement Rates.

Washington falls under the category of states that have fewer than 60 percent of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. Reimbursement rates vary based on the type of meal served; the number of students who qualify for free or reduced price meals (FRPM); and other factors.

The McKinney-Vento Act.

In 2015, the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act (Act) was reauthorized requiring the delivery of services to remove barriers to the enrollment and retention of homeless children and youth in schools. Every school district or local education agency (LEA) is required to implement the Act. In implementing the Act, the LEAs must appoint a local homeless liaison who is responsible for ensuring that homeless children and youth are identified, enrolled immediately in school, and linked to services. A local homeless liaison must be an employee of the school district they are serving and may be a school social worker, school counselor, educator, federal programs administrator, or school support staff.

The law also requires the LEAs to identify homeless children and youth and enable homeless children and youth to participate in federal, state, and local nutrition programs for which they are eligible.

The Act defines "homeless children and youths" as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. Examples of eligible individuals include:

- children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals; and
- children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for a human.

Summary of Bill:

Schools are required to provide a meal that qualifies for federal reimbursement as a FRPM to each student requesting a meal, unless requested otherwise by a parent or guardian. Students requesting a meal may receive one regardless of the student's ability to pay for the meal or for meals previously served to the student. Schools are required to take specified actions, including contacting the parent or guardian, if a student has not paid for five or more previous meals.

Schools participating in the NSLP or the SBP must annually distribute and collect applications for households of children in kindergarten through twelfth grade to determine student eligibility for free and reduced-price meals, and, if necessary, provide language assistance with application materials. Schools are required in accordance with federally-granted authority to complete and submit an eligibility application for a student if, based on information available to the school, the student is likely eligible for FRPM.

Schools and districts are prohibited from publicly identifying or stigmatizing, or taking any action that would likely publicly identify or stigmatize, a student who cannot pay for a school meal or for meals previously served to the student. Schools and districts are also prohibited from requiring parents or guardians to pay fees or costs from collection agencies hired to collect amounts owed for previously served meals.

School districts must designate local liaisons for homeless children and youths to coordinate with the applicable school nutrition program to ensure that each homeless student has proper access to free school meals.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 12, 2018.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.