



Home of the "Mustangs"

MAINE CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL #10

10 Spring Valley Road PO Box 50010 Parks, AZ 86018

Superintendent - - Dr. Justin Roberson

(928) 635-2115 Fax (928) 635-5320

Superintendent Hoffman Announces \$6.75 Million Investment for School Meals

Funding will waive reduced-price meal fees for qualifying families through School Year 2023-2024

PHOENIX, Ariz. (December 14, 2022) – Arizona Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman today announced that the Arizona Department of Education will allocate \$6.75 million in pandemic relief funds to waive fees for students qualifying for reduced-price school meals. Beginning in January, this investment will make school meals free for thousands of Arizona students who do not already qualify for federally funded free meals. The funding will last through the end of the 2023-2024 school year and will pay for over 2.2 million meals.

"Ensuring no child in Arizona goes hungry is not a political issue. In fact, we have a moral obligation as a state to do so," said Superintendent Hoffman. "I strongly believe that school meals should be universally free across our country because students cannot learn effectively if one of their most basic needs is not met. While we continue to fight for universal free meals, funding like this will help remove barriers for families and students across Arizona. And I urge our legislature to make this funding permanent once relief dollars expire."

Currently, a family of four with an annual household income between \$36,076 and \$51,338 pay a reduced price for school meals – families making less have access to free meals in schools operating the National School Lunch Program.

"If parents earn even one-dollar more than those thresholds, they have to pay more," said Angie Rodgers, President and CEO of the Arizona Food Bank Network. "These are families that are struggling to make ends meet, especially right now, with rising food prices. They're oftentimes unable to cover those fees, day in and day out, leading kids to go without or schools to take on debt. The investment announced by Superintendent Hoffman today is a win-win for families and schools."

Today's announcement is also being celebrated by school district leadership across the state.

"We all know it's harder for our students to succeed when they are hungry. Allocating funds to ensure that thousands of Arizona students are supported by providing access to nutritious food helps our schools to address the lingering concerns caused by the pandemic," said Dr. Melissa Sadorf, Superintendent of Stanfield Elementary School District. "These include mental health issues, impaired cognitive development, and other chronic health conditions like diabetes. I applaud Superintendent Hoffman's continued focus on tackling the issue of child hunger."

"This investment will not only result in positive educational outcomes and assist families struggling to assure their kids are properly fed, but it will also lead to both operational and administrative efficiencies on our school campuses," said Joe Howard, Superintendent of Prescott Unified School District.

Yesterday, researchers from the Food Policy and Environment Research Group at the College of Health Solutions at Arizona State University (ASU) published preliminary findings from a statewide assessment of the costs and benefits of making healthy school meals more accessible. These findings underscore that making healthy school meals accessible to all kids at no cost results in improved food security, attendance and academic performance.

"While our study focused on the impact of school meals being accessible to all kids at no cost, it also found that eliminating the 'reduced price' copay leads to greater participation in school meal programs overall," said Sarah Martinelli, Clinical Associate Professor at ASU's College of Health Solutions.

Families will still be required to submit an application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals to their child's school for eligibility determination as well as for federal and state data reporting purposes. Schools are encouraged to let families know before January that all students who qualify for reduced-price meals will receive free meals.

For a summary of the ASU assessment, visit <https://azfoodbanks.org/healthy-school-meals/>. The full research report will be released and available on the Arizona Food Bank Network's website in January 2023.

The Arizona Department of Education Health and Nutrition Services will be issuing additional operator guidance in the coming weeks.