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Hunger-Free Schools Ohio Coalition calls on lawmakers to provide immediate relief for growing child hunger crisis

COLUMBUS – February 20, 2023 – While lawmakers in Ohio's statehouse continue to discuss potential options for expanding access to nutritious school meals for all children in the state, Ohio parents, educators, and policy experts joined together for a virtual panel discussion Monday morning to push for immediate action. [A full recording of Monday's press event can be found here.](#)

"Every child in Ohio, regardless of where they're from, what they look like, or how much money their parents make, needs to be able to eat full, nutritionally complete meals at school. Therefore, allowing them to focus on what they're learning, not on the hunger pangs they're feeling," said Ohio Education Association President **Scott DiMauro**, who hosted Monday's discussion on behalf of the Hunger-Free Schools Ohio coalition. "Although the pandemic-era federal programs that ensured every Ohio child could receive free meals at school have ended, there is more than enough money in Ohio right now to ensure no student goes without the meals they need."

"Having meals provided for my child when universal meal programs were in place in Ohio made a huge difference in our lives. Now, every dollar we're spending on meals is a dollar we can't spend on the other things we need," said **Megan Thompson**, a parent in the Wellington Exempted School District in Lorain County who shared her family's story during the Hunger-Free Schools Ohio discussion this week.

"Our students are keenly aware of the difference having nutritious school meals makes in their days along with the struggles some of their peers face in trying to pay for those meals," said Bluffton Middle School Principal **Josh Kauffman**, whose Allen County students hosted a bake sale to pay off the lunch debts of their classmates. "Unfortunately, there is a stigma around accepting necessary help to access school meals. But that stigma disappears when systems are in place to provide healthy school meals for all."

"One in six children, and as many as one in four children in certain counties, lives in a household that faces hunger—that's 413,000 kids across Ohio. School meals play an essential role in alleviating child hunger and improving child wellbeing. We hope lawmakers will prioritize our kids and school nutrition programs in this biennial budget by expanding critical access to school meals," said **Katherine Ungar**, a Children's Defense Fund-Ohio Policy Associate who wrote the ["School Meals Support Ohio Student Health and Learning" white paper.](#)

"It has been heartbreaking to see students who are unable to pay for their school lunches turned away from the nutritious food they need. Our dedicated cafeteria staff should never have to serve as both caring food service professionals and hard-hearted debt collectors," said **Daryn Guarino**, Director of Food and Nutrition for Alexander Local Schools in Athens County.

“School meals are a basic need for every student to be able to learn and reach their full potential in our classrooms,” agreed **Lindy Douglas**, Special Programs Coordinator for Alexander Local Schools. “Especially here in rural Appalachia, where our kids already struggle to have a level playing field in so many ways, our kids can’t afford to have our state leaders fail to act on this urgent issue. Ohio lawmakers must act now to make sure every child is fed.”

B-Roll video of students enjoying school meals [is available here](#) for the convenience of reporters covering Monday’s media event.

ABOUT HUNGER-FREE SCHOOLS OHIO

We are a passionate collective representing more than 40 local and statewide anti-hunger, education, food, and nutrition organizations and associations who are working to take hunger off the table, committed to ensuring that every student in Ohio has access to healthy school meals. Learn more at hungerfreeschoolsoh.org