



February 25, 2025

To: Chairperson Murman and Members of the Education Committee  
From: Anahí Salazar, Policy Coordinator for Voices for Children in Nebraska  
**RE: Support for LB 14- Adopt the Hunger-Free Schools Act**

Children are Nebraska’s greatest resource, and when all children can reach their full potential in adulthood, our state and economy are better off. Hunger during the school day means that children are unable to learn, more likely to be absent or tardy, and are more likely to have behavioral issues in the classroom.<sup>1</sup> Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 14 because it would ensure that every student in our state’s public schools is nourished during the school day.

LB 14 would ensure that every student is going into their classroom in the morning fueled for the day. Achieving student success in the classroom is directly correlated with students having their basic needs met, one of which is healthy and nutritious meals. No cost meals help students’ well-being by decreasing the stressor of having to figure out if they have enough money in their school account for their next school meal. **In 2023, there were about 105,400 Nebraska households who were food-insecure, which increased by almost 8,000 in one year.**<sup>2</sup> Nebraska’s highest rate of 112,000 food-insecure households was in 2011, 14 years ago, and unfortunately feels like we are moving backwards, towards those high numbers, more than a decade later.<sup>3</sup>

Since 1946, school meals have provided an effective solution to hunger as a barrier to learning. With the ongoing success of the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs, LB 14 would ensure that every student is ready to learn every day. A student who is hungry cannot learn. Students with food insecurity can have lower math and reading gains, increased risk of poor physical and mental health outcomes, and lower academic readiness. *Federal child nutrition programs provide funds for each breakfast and lunch served in participating schools, with higher reimbursement rates provided for meals served to students from low-income households and schools with higher levels of poverty receiving a higher reimbursement per meal.* These federal reimbursement levels are referenced in LB 14 to offset the cost of providing free meals to every student: <sup>4</sup>

Reimbursement per meal	Federal Reimbursement		LB 14 Reimbursement	
	Breakfast	Lunch	Breakfast	Lunch
Free	\$2.39-\$2.84	\$4.43-\$4.54	None	None
Reduced-Price	\$2.07-\$2.54	\$4.03-\$4.14	\$0.30	\$0.40
Paid	\$0.39	\$0.42-\$0.53	\$2.37-\$2.84	\$4.43-\$4.54

<sup>1</sup> i Council on Community Pediatrics and Committee on Nutrition, “Promoting Food Insecurity for All Children,” Pediatrics 136, no. 5 (2015), doi: 10.1542/peds.2015-3301. Food Research and Action Center, “Research Brief: Breakfast for Learning,” October 2016, <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/breakfastforlearning-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Food insecure means that someone in the household reduced their meal intake because there was not enough food to eat in the home. Almost 98,000 households in Nebraska were food-insecure in 2022.

<sup>3</sup> 2024 Kids Count Report, Voices for Children in Nebraska, pg53.

<sup>4</sup> Food and Nutrition Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Average Payments/Maximum Reimbursement Rates, [EN10JY24.021\\_original\\_size.png\(1622x2667\)](EN10JY24.021_original_size.png(1622x2667))

With no cost meals, students will be able to concentrate on their academics and school, families will not have to worry about the extra financial burden, and educators can feel reassured in knowing their students are receiving meals throughout the day. LB 14 eliminates inequity by expanding access to food for every student. School meals should be a social time for every student, and LB 14 would allow students to joyfully interact with their peers, preventing added stressors for themselves and their families. When schools are able to offer no cost meals, school stigma in the lunchroom becomes a nonfactor.

LB 14 would allow schools and educators to better focus on providing a quality education to every child, while ensuring that more children are ready to learn. Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 14 because it would ensure children across the state of Nebraska access to school nutritious meals. Thank you, Senator Cavanaugh, for bringing this important issue forward and we respectfully urge the committee to advance LB 14. Thank you.

Leg. District	School District	Enrolled	Free	Free %	Reduced	Reduced %	Free and Reduced	Free and Reduced %
38	Murman							
	CLAY COUNTY	664	253	38.1%	106	16.0%	359	54.1%
	Sutton Public Schools	396	128	32.3%	34	26.6%	162	40.91%
	Harvard Public Schools	208	125	60.1%	74	35.6%	199	95.67%
	NUCKOLLS COUNTY	1124	405	36.0%	116	10.3%	521	46.40%
	Superior Public Schools	418	170	40.7%	102	24.4%	272	65.07%
	South Central Nebraska Unified 5	733	243	33.2%	64	8.7%	307	41.88%
	THAYER COUNTY	921	240	26.1%	79	8.6%	319	34.60%
	Deshler Public Schools	238	77	32.4%	30	12.6%	107	44.96%
	Thayer Central Community Schools	428	110	25.7%	41	9.6%	151	35.28%
	Bruning-Davenport Unified Schools	181	43	23.8%	20	11.1%	63	34.81%
	WEBSTER COUNTY	587	192	32.7%	57	9.7%	249	42.40%
	Red Cloud Community Schools	286	126	44.1%	24	8.4%	150	52.45%
	Blue Hill Community Schools	305	65	21.3%	16	5.2%	81	26.56%
	FRANKLIN COUNTY	290	100	34.5%	42	14.5%	142	49.00%
	Franklin Public Schools	298	120	40.3%	72	24.2%	192	64.43%
	HARLAN COUNTY	359	95	26.5%	42	11.7%	137	38.20%
	Alma Public Schools	382	115	30.1%	42	11.0%	157	41.10%
	FURNAS COUNTY	1006	418	41.6%	109	10.8%	527	52.40%
	Arapahoe Public Schools	321	130	40.5%	38	11.8%	168	52.34%
	Cambridge Public Schools	287	100	34.8%	32	11.2%	132	45.99%
	Southern Valley Schools	397	171	43.1%	37	9.3%	208	52.39%
	RED WILLOW COUNTY	1843	592	32.1%	187	10.1%	779	42.30%
	McCook Public Schools	1386	460	33.2%	129	9.3%	589	42.50%



Leg. District	School District	Enrolled	Free	Free %	Reduced	Reduced %	Free and Reduced	Free and Reduced %
8	Sen. Hunt							
	DOUGLAS COUNTY	117309	44168	37.7%	23000	19.6%	67168	57.30%
	Omaha Public Schools	51693	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP
5	Sen. Juarez							
	DOUGLAS COUNTY	117309	44168	37.7%	23000	19.6%	67168	57.30%
	Omaha Public Schools	51693	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP
17	Sen. Lonowski							
	Part of PHELPS COUNTY	1623	468	28.8%	165	10.2%	633	39.00%
	Bertrand Public Schools	241	84	34.9%	25	10.4%	109	49.23%
	Loomis Public Schools	277	71	25.6%	38	13.7%	109	39.35%
	KEARNEY COUNTY	1389	350	25.2%	114	8.2%	464	33.40%
	Wilcox-Hildreth Public Schools	242	73	30.2%	27	11.2%	100	41.32%
	Axtell Community Schools	328	92	28.0%	17	5.2%	109	33.23%
	Minden Public Schools	781	210	26.9%	58	7.4%	268	34.31%
	ADAMS COUNTY	5737	1824	31.8%	476	8.3%	2300	40.10%
	Kenesaw Public Schools	276	56	20.3%	22	8.0%	78	28.26%
	Hastings Public Schools	3740	1817	48.6%	380	10.2%	2197	58.74%
	Adams Central Public Schools	1029	135	13.1%	56	5.4%	191	18.56%
	Silver Lake Public Schools	216	56	26.0%	25	11.6%	81	37.50%
17	Sen. Meyer							
	WAYNE COUNTY	1874	590	31.5%	213	11.4%	803	42.80%
	Wayne Community Schools	1009	289	28.6%	91	9.0%	380	37.66%
	Wakefield Public Schools	594	284	47.8%	76	12.8%	360	60.61%
	Winside Public Schools	249	65	26.1%	42	16.9%	107	42.97%

Leg. District	School District	Enrolled	Free	Free %	Reduced	Reduced %	Free and Reduced	Free and Reduced %
	THURSTON COUNTY	2076	1325	63.8%	493	23.7%	1818	87.60%
	Pender Public Schools	423	151	35.7%	45	10.6%	196	46.34%
	Walthill Public Schools	321	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP
	UMONHONNATION Public Schools	664	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP
	Winnebago Public Schools	638	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP	CEP
	DAKOTA COUNTY	4387	2251	51.3%	668	15.2%	2919	66.50%
	South Sioux City Community Schools	3801	2266	60.0%	596	15.7%	2862	75.30%
	Homer Community Schools	444	178	40.1%	29	6.5%	207	46.62%
	PART OF DIXON COUNTY but no schools in that area	837	156	18.6%	94	11.2%	250	29.90%
45	Sen. Sanders							
	SARPY COUNTY	31410	6236	19.9%	1985	6.3%	8221	26.20%
	Bellevue Public Schools	9444	2829	30.0%	810	8.6%	3639	38.53%
	<b>STATEWIDE</b>	<b>365687</b>	<b>122987</b>	<b>33.6%</b>	<b>47006</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>169993</b>	<b>46.5%</b>