



February 17, 2026

To: Chairperson Murman, and members of the Education Committee
From: Anahí Salazar, Voices for Children in Nebraska
RE: Support for LB 966, Adopt the Hunger-Free Schools Act

School meals are as important to students' academic success as transportation and textbooks. 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.¹ Voices for Children in Nebraska supports LB 966 because it would ensure that more students in our state's schools are nourished during the school day.

LB 966 would ensure that more students go into their classroom in the morning fueled for the day, and a nutritious lunch to continue their learning through the afternoon. Achieving student success in the classroom is directly correlated with students having their basic needs met, one of which is healthy and nutritious meals. Providing students who come from families that are on the cusp of free meals with a no cost meal would 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.**² 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.³

Nebraskans are hard-working people, almost 80% of children in our state have all available parents in the workforce.⁴ Families are doing what they can to provide for their children's basic needs, but the rise in food costs has made it all that more difficult to make ends meet. Food prices rose faster than overall inflation according to the USDA, up by over 3% from December of 2024 to 2025.⁵

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 966 would ensure that more students are 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. Students who participate in school breakfast programs have improved attendance as well as decrease tardiness. The benefits to children in providing school meals

¹ 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>

² 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.

³ 2024 Kids Count Report, Voices for Children in Nebraska, pg53.

⁴ Id.

⁵ [Food Price Outlook - Summary Findings | Economic Research Service](#), updated January 23, 2026.

is endless from improving mental health and reducing anxiety and depression to increasing the consumption of nutritious fruits and vegetables.⁶

*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 966 to offset the cost of providing free meals to every student:*⁷

Reimbursement per meal	Federal Reimbursement		LB 966 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

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. We want to thank Senator Cavanaugh for introducing legislation during her years at the legislature that would help improve children’s access to school meals and the Committee for your consideration. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to advance LB 966.

⁶ Clark, M. A., & Fox, M. K. (2009). Nutritional quality of the diets of U.S. public school children and the role of the school meal programs. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19166672/>. Accessed on June 14, 2021.

⁷ Food and Nutrition Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Average Payments/Maximum Reimbursement Rates, [EN10JY24.021_original_size.png \(1622x2667\)](#)