



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

*PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990*

February 15, 2005

The Honorable Dave Quall  
Washington State House of Representatives  
Education Committee Chair  
301 John L. O'Brien Building  
PO Box 40600  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Quall:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to support the concept of House Bill 1771, which is scheduled to be heard before your committee tomorrow. This bill requires school districts to implement a school breakfast program in each school where more than 40 percent of students eligible to participate in the school lunch program qualify for free or reduced-price meal reimbursement by the school year 2005-06. It also specifies the dates when each school district must submit data to the superintendent of public instruction for determining which schools within the district qualify for this requirement. Finally, the bill requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (in consultation with representatives of school directors, school food service, community-based organizations, and the Washington State PTA) to develop the process and criteria by which school districts are exempted.

In Washington, nearly one out of five children in grades 9–12 are either overweight or at risk of becoming overweight. The availability of healthy foods in schools is one of the essential elements needed to overcome this serious health risk to our children. Only 30 percent (or less) of the calories consumed in school meals come from fats, and less than 10 percent come from saturated fats. Students need healthy options if they are to make better nutritional choices.

Students require nutrients and energy for concentration on academic tasks. Studies have found that increased participation in school breakfast programs is associated with increased academic test scores, daily attendance, and class participation.

Hunger and food insecurity are serious issues in Washington—our state ranks among the top ten in the nation with the highest levels of hunger. An expanded school nutrition program may help to alleviate hunger and food insecurity for children. There is evidence which suggests that missing breakfast and experiencing hunger impairs children's academic performance.

The bill specifies the dates when each school district must submit data to the superintendent of public instruction to determine which schools within the district qualify for this requirement. I respectfully suggest that the language describing these dates be clarified as the current wording of the bill makes the timing of the implementation schedule unclear.

The Board acknowledges that there is a need to increase access to the school breakfast program for children in our state and so is in support of the goals of bill; however, we are unable to comment on the additional burdens that implementation of the bill may place upon school districts—we leave that to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education. The Board also recognizes that the state faces a serious budget shortfall and that the Legislature will have to make many very difficult decisions about funding this session.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Locke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Thomas Locke, MD, MPH  
Chair, Washington State Board of Health

cc: House Education Committee Members  
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office  
Ms. Chris Townley, Department of Health  
Mr. Greg Williamson, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Ms. Kate Lykins-Brown, State Board of Education  
Washington State Board of Health Members  
Mr. Craig McLaughlin, State Board of Health