

Rate increase will bring in more funds to feed Hawaii's keiki

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In response to efforts from local groups and Hawaii's congressional delegation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) last week announced that Hawaii's reimbursement rates for school lunch and other federal child nutrition programs will be increased by 13 percent.

These higher rates are expected to bring an additional \$8 million a year to our state to support healthy meals for children.

Hawaii schools, child care, afterschool and summer programs provide meals and snacks to more than 100,000 children, which are reimbursed by the federal government at a per-meal rate set by the USDA.

This rate increase for Hawaii is the culmination of years of work by local anti-hunger organizations and child advocacy groups.

Hawaii Appleseed, Hawaii Children's Action Network, Ulupono Initiative and the Hawaii Afterschool Alliance teamed together for a major push in May 2022 with the release of the "*Feed Our Keiki*" report.

"*Feed Our Keiki*" showed that the federal reimbursement rates didn't come close to matching the current cost of providing school meals here.

Hawaii's congressional delegation jointly called upon the USDA to cover the "*full, accurate cost of school meals*" in the state and then passed a provision in the federal government funding bill that successfully directed USDA to make the increase.

As a result, starting in July 2023, Hawaii's reimbursement rates will rise from the current 17 percent to 30 percent over the continental U.S. rates.

"*We have been trying to get this increase for over a decade,*" said Daniela Spoto, director of anti-hunger initiatives at Hawaii Appleseed.

"*Hawaii's reimbursement rate was far too low to be able to operate these programs effectively, and it has been negatively affecting our ability to serve quality meals to children.*"

The new funding will be applied to all child meal programs in the state, which include the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program, the Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Summer Food Service Program.

“This increase will also help after school and summer programs provide meals for our kids and youth, ensuring that they have access to food outside of school time,” said Paula Adams, executive director of the Hawaii Afterschool Alliance.

Spoto commented, *“We are incredibly excited for what this means for improving access to and quality of Hawaii’s school meals.”* Congratulations to these groups for pushing this issue for years and achieving their goal.