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State gets more funding for school lunches

Thursday, February 9, 2023, 12:05 a.m.

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Sen. Brian Schatz meets with kids and helps distribute Summer Food Service Program meals at the Kalihi YI Honolulu in July 2022.

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Hawaii will receive an additional \$8 million annually to help provide school lunches for keiki.

The U.S. The Department of Agriculture announced this week reimbursement rates for school lunch will increase by 13% this year.

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Funding will go toward providing healthy meals at Hawaii schools, child care, after-school and summer programs where more than 100,000 children will benefit.

The rate increase is the culmination of several years of work by local anti-hunger organizations and child advocacy groups including Hawaii Appleseed, Hawaii Children's Action Network, Ulupono Initiative and the Hawaii Afterschool Alliance.

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The groups worked together to publish the Feed Our Keiki report in May 2022, which showed the federal reimbursement rates didn't meet the current cost of providing school meals in Hawaii.

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"We have been trying to get this increase for over a decade," Daniela Spoto, director of anti-hunger initiatives at Hawaii Appleseed, said in a press release. "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. We are incredibly excited for what this means for improving access to and quality of Hawaii's school meals."

The effort was assisted by U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii, who helped get the reimbursement rate increased.

"This increase is a big win for kids across Hawaii and for our state," said Schatz in a release. "I thank the USDA for working with us to boost Hawaii's funding so that students who rely on the program can continue to get the healthy meals they need to succeed in school."

Starting in July 2023, reimbursement rates will rise from the current 17% to 30% above the mainland U.S. rates.