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Free School Meals Save Taxpayers Money in the Long Run

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As a parent of young kids, I know that it can be a struggle to get them to focus on their schoolwork. As a scholar of local food systems, I know that it's impossible if they're hungry.

A solution exists that benefits parents, children, teachers and small farmers alike: universal breakfast and lunch at school. Research shows these policies improve kids' learning while keeping local dollars circulating in the economy. That's why eight states offer free school meals to all children, regardless of family income. Indiana could be the ninth.

Hoosier families have already seen the benefits of universal school lunches. In March 2020, Congress issued a waiver allowing schools to serve free meals to all children regardless of income or standing debts. Incredibly, while households saw an uptick in food insecurity during the first few months of the Coronavirus pandemic, food insecurity largely returned to its pre-pandemic levels by the beginning of 2021.