



To: Senate Committee on Education
Re: Support for SB 221
From: Deborah Bond-Upson, HE'E Interim Director
Date: February 26, 2025

Hui for Excellence in Education, or "HE'E," is a statewide coalition of diverse stakeholders committed to working collaboratively to identify opportunities to improve public education. We work to provide Hawai'i families and organizations with a resource for educational policy.

We write in support of SB 221, requiring the Department of Education to provide free breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in a public school, with the amendment that free meals be available to all. Limiting free meals to students who qualify based on specific guidelines creates unnecessary barriers and may stigmatize those who rely on this essential program. A universal approach ensures that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have access to the nutrition they need to focus on learning.

Students' access to healthy meals is critical to academic success and achievement. Access to nutritious meals also promotes students' short term and long-term health, improves behavioral outcomes, and improves overall wellbeing. For some students, school meals may be their only consistent source of food. The School Breakfast Program (SBP) provides reimbursement to states to operate nonprofit breakfast programs in schools. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools. These programs draw Federal funds into our state to help ensure Hawai'i's children have access to healthy nutritious meals.

We urge you to support universal free meals for our keiki.

Thank you for this opportunity to share our thoughts.

HE'E Coalition Members and Participants -----

Academy 21
Alliance for Place Based Learning
American Civil Liberties Union
Atherton YMCA
Education Institute of Hawai'i
*Faith Action for Community Equity
Fresh Leadership LLC
Girl Scouts Hawai'i
*HawaiiKidsCAN
*Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance
*Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice
*Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists
Hawai'i Athletic League of Scholars
*Hawai'i Children's Action Network
Hawai'i Education Association
Hawai'i Nutrition and Physical Activity Coalition
*Hawai'i State PTSA
Hawai'i State Student Council
Hawai'i State Teachers Association
Head Start Collaboration Office
It's All About Kids*INPEACE

Joint Venture Education Forum
Junior Achievement of Hawaii
Kamehameha Schools
Kanu Hawai'i
Kaua'i Ho'okele Council
Keiki to Career Kaua'i
Kupu A'e
*Leaders for the Next Generation
Learning First
McREL's Pacific Center for Changing the Odds
Native Hawaiian Education Council
Our Public School
*Pacific Resources for Education and Learning
*Parents and Children Together
*Parents for Public Schools Hawai'i
Special Education Provider Alliance
*Teach for America
The Learning Coalition
US PACOM
University of Hawai'i College of Education
*Youth Service Hawai'i

Voting Members () Voting member organizations vote on action items while individual and non-voting participants may collaborate on all efforts within the Coalition.*