



February 11, 2025

Via E-Mail Delivery

Senator Mary Kunesch, Chair
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 3209
St. Paul, MN 55155

Senator Jason Rarick, Lead
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 3413
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Kunesch and Lead Rarick:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter regarding the Free School Meals for Kids Program enacted into law and first effective for the 2023-24 school year.

For background, MINNDEPENDENT is the state's largest advocacy organization supporting independent and nonpublic schools and students since 1976. The organization represents 180 schools and over 41,000 students enrolled in member schools throughout the state with 55% located in the metro area and 45% located in Greater Minnesota.

As you may know, nonpublic schools have participated in the National School Lunch Program since the 1970's. Providing children with food security – particularly students from low-income families – was recognized as a common good regardless of where the child attended school. In Minnesota, nonpublic schools work with local school districts or contract out services to provide this valuable program for students.

To date, approximately 130 nonpublic schools have continued to participate in the NSLP and provide universal breakfast and lunch to all students.

Unfortunately, during the implementation of the Free School Meals for Kids Program, it was discovered that pre-kindergarten students enrolled in nonpublic schools are not eligible for the program, unlike their counterparts in charter and public schools. This is due to how pre-kindergarten programs are categorized in nonpublic schools. These programs are licensed under the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), unlike charter and public schools.

MINNDEPENDENT is requesting the legislature consider removing this barrier for pre-kindergarten children enrolled in nonpublic schools. This fix will allow for all children to participate in the Free School Meals for Kids Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tim Benz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tim" and last name "Benz" clearly visible.

Tim Benz
President