

Premier's \$1.4bn lunch cash splash could be better spent elsewhere

Queensland Legislative Assembly	
Number: SB25T 315	Tabled <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
MP: Hon. <i>Hayden Johnson</i>	By Leave <input type="checkbox"/>
Clerk's Signature: <i>S. Gallet</i>	

P&C Queensland has argued Labor's cash splash of \$1.4bn to give each state school student a free lunch could be better spent elsewhere.

Hayden Johnson and Taylah Fellows

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October 14, 2024 - 1:46PM

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Steven Miles' pledge to give every state school student access to free lunch has been met with mixed reactions.

The premier has assured voters his \$1.4bn proposal would not affect Queensland's projected budget surplus in 2026-27.

While the Premier could not say what the forecast surplus would be, he asserted that the \$1.4bn spend had been "factored into the costings".

Mr Miles said logistics and operational costs, including hiring staff and food coordinators for schools without tuckshops, had also been factored into the \$1.4bn spend.

The government expects 76 per cent of Queensland's 326,000 primary school students would take up the free lunch offer either full time or partially.

"It's modelled on average meal cost," he said.

"That does accept that it will be more expensive in some locations than others. It also acknowledges that portion sizes will vary depending on the age group, so the meal delivered to a prep class will likely be smaller (than older cohorts)."

Each school district will be required to submit their individual needs to be able to execute the funding, with grant money to be divided according to need.

P&C Queensland says Labor's pledge was an acknowledgement of cost-of-living pressures, but argued the money could be better spent elsewhere.

Chair Donagh Freestun called for cost-of-education relief for state school parents and guardians to support kids' access to a quality education.

"The costs of a quality education are growing with Queensland parents paying up to \$4700 per child in school-related expenses like student resource scheme, subject fees, school camps, excursions, sport and music, uniforms and book packs" she said.

Premier Steven Miles with his wife Kim and daughter Bridie 10, Grace Grace, Cameron Dick and Shannon Fentiman as he holds his party launch at the North Lakes Community Centre. Pic: Adam Head

"The free lunch initiative acknowledges a problem, we believe the funding would be better distributed across all state school students, allowing parents to target things they need most.

"We will keep advocating on behalf of all families of state school students to give every child every chance."

FareShare and Secondbite chief executive Fiona Maxwell said hunger relief charities will be ready to step in to offer delivery to rural and remote areas however, logistics are yet to be detailed.

Education Minister Di Farmer was forced to defend comments she made during a 2021 parliament debate when she called an identical Greens proposal to offer school students free breakfast and lunch "irresponsible" and incapable of solving the wider issue of hunger.

"I don't know about you, but I don't find the Greens very good on the budget," she said.

"It would have been about \$3 per meal for a child which might get you instant noodles and an apple."

Childhood nutrition professor Danieele Gallegos said free lunches would serve the same purpose as a free breakfast, but with the added benefit of taking more stress off parents.

“Some of the school’s already giving free breakfast, which is fantastic, but a free lunch will actually be about one further intake,” she said.

“Breakfast is easy to prepare in the morning and can be nice and quick, whereas lunches can feel really challenging.”