

Summer food program funds in limbo

Legislation on the back burner would support low-income school meals.

BY DANA HAYNES
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A bill to help public schools provide free lunches this summer is stalled in the legislative process, and nobody seems to know if, or when, it will emerge.

Senate Bill 287 would maintain a summer food program for some of the most poverty-stricken schools in Oregon. The summer lunches are paid for by federal money, but the Senate bill would provide state funds to help operate the program.

The money — \$49,000 — would be directed toward schools in which 85 percent or more of the students receive free or reduced-price lunches. That's a shorthand way of counting the families that fall below poverty lines within a school's boundaries.

Any school where 50 percent or more of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals may have a summer food program, but this bill, sponsored by Sen. Ryan Deckert, D-Beaverton, only focuses on

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schools with the higher poverty rate. Only 22 schools in Oregon fall into that category, according to Tina Kotek, spokeswoman for Children First, an advocacy agency. Five of the 22 are in the Salem-Keizer School District and five are in Woodburn.

"It's federal money that the schools get reimbursed with, but it's still tough to run the program at cost," Kotek said. "It'd be nice to have that money for the schools by July 1."

That's when the next fiscal year begins. If the bill hasn't moved, school districts will have to operate the summer lunch program with other funds.

Funding comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is administered by the Oregon Department of Education.

Ginny Heide, nutrition services supervisor for Woodburn schools, said the lunch program is popular there. "We served probably about 900 a day last year," she said. "I'm working on fliers right now in English, Spanish and Russian, to let people know we'll be doing it again this year."

Heide said district officials plan to operate the program with

Other bills

Other bills related to poverty and food programs, which also are stalled in the Legislature, include:

HOUSE BILL 2898: Appropriates \$100,000 to the Department of Human Services for a statewide food stamp outreach campaign.

SENATE BILL 500: Appropriates \$49,000 to the Department of Human Services to provide fruits and vegetables from farmers markets to people eligible for the Women, Infants and Children Program.

SENATE BILL 501: Appropriates \$40,000 to the Department of Human Services for farmers market nutrition program for seniors.

or without the extra funding.

David Harvey handles summer food programs for Salem-Keizer. Last year, he said, the district provided 50,000 lunches and more than 4,000 breakfasts.

"This year, we're starting earlier. We're going to start the first day after school gets out and run through the last week in August," he said. The venues for the breakfasts will expand, too, from 13 to 16 sites, including schools and Boys & Girls clubs.

The bill has been assigned to the Education Subcommittee of Ways and Means, the Legislature's budget-writing body. It

Local schools

Of 22 Oregon public schools that would be affected, 10 are local. They are:

SALEM-KEIZER

HALLMAN Elementary School

WASHINGTON Elementary School

HOOVER Elementary School

BUSH Elementary School

LAKE LABISH Elementary School

WOODBURN

LINCOLN Elementary School

WASHINGTON Elementary School

NELLIE MUIR Elementary School

VALOR Middle School

HERITAGE Elementary School

has not been scheduled for a hearing.

Deckert said he doesn't know why. "July 1 is the date. If we're going to start this up for this year, we've got to get the money done now."

Sen. Kurt Schrader, D-Canby and co-chairman of Ways and Means, said he doesn't know if the bill will get heard.

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