

State set to chip in for summer lunches

The program to assist low-income students advances.

BY DANA HAYNES
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Oregon's most poverty-stricken schools moved a step closer to some statewide assistance for summer lunch programs Thursday.

A bill that had been held up in committee for months abruptly emerged at a brief, last-minute public hearing of the Ways and Means Education Subcommittee. It passed unanimously and goes to the full Ways and Means

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Committee this morning.

Senate Bill 287-A would provide \$49,000 in the 2003-05 biennium to help start summer lunch programs — or to bolster existing summer lunch programs. It would apply to schools where 85 percent or more of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches; a common yardstick for measuring poverty.

Of the 22 Oregon schools that meet the criteria, five are in Salem-Keizer and five are in Woodburn.

"This bill leverages federal dollars that are available to the

What's next?

The full Ways and Means Committee is expected to hear Senate Bill 287-A at 9 a.m. today in Hearing Room F at the Capitol.

state of Oregon, which currently we forgo," said Sen. Ryan Deckert, D-Beaverton, a co-sponsor of the bill. "We're kind of in a hurry. We're trying to get it to the schools this summer."

Salem-Keizer expanded its summer lunch program to begin this week, on the first day that school was out for the break.

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

Deckert said he went to the co-chairmen of Ways and Means — Rep. Randy Miller, R-West Linn, and Sen. Kurt Schrader, D-Canby — and asked them to expedite the bill.

"They agreed to kick it right out," he said.

Although most of the poorest schools would offer summer lunch programs anyway, the state money helps them offset the costs.

Tina Kotek, policy director of Children First For Oregon, a private, nonprofit agency, said her group made SB 287-A a top priority for this legislative session because of Oregon's high rate of hunger.

Adrienne Sexton, a subcommittee adviser from the Legislative Fiscal Office, said the bill won't cost extra revenue. The Department of Education will be directed to find \$49,000 in savings, somewhere in its budget, to offset the cost.

Dana Haynes can be reached at (503) 589-6903 or dhaynes@StatesmanJournal.com