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# School lunch program clears last hurdle

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The bill would help fund meals at Oregon's poorest schools.

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A bill to bolster summer lunch programs for Oregon's most poverty-stricken schools has passed its last hurdle in the Capitol and awaits the governor's signature.

The bill leverages federal dollars and directs them toward schools with 85 percent or more of the students receiving free or reduced-price lunches—a common measuring stick reflecting poverty rates.

Senate Bill 287 requires the state Department of Education to redirect \$49,000 toward the 22

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most poverty-stricken schools in the state. Five are in Salem-Kelzer and five are in Woodburn. Nellie Muir Elementary

School is one such campus in Woodburn. Ginny Heide, district nutrition director, said the school's free lunch program began Monday and will start at her other schools later this week. "We had 150 kids, which I thought was good for a first day," Heide said. "We had a lot of walk-ins. We had mothers showing up with five or six kids."

Because of the diversity of Woodburn's population, Heide had been advertising the program in English, Russian and Spanish. All ethnic groups are expected to take advantage of

the program, she added.

The Senate bill will provide extra support for the district's efforts. It is not yet known exactly how the money will break down.

"Hundreds and hundreds of students need this. This really will be a key moment for these young people," said Sen. Ryan Decker, D-Beaverton, a co-sponsor of the bill.

The House earlier passed the bill and modified it with an opt-out clause for districts that would have to bus students from many miles away.

SB 287 is the first of three interrelated bills wending their way through the Legislature. Two others are expected to appear before the Human Services Subcommittee of the budget-

writing Ways and Means Committee either today or Wednesday.

Senate Bill 500 would appropriate \$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 would appropriate \$40,000 to the Department of Human Services for a farmers market nutrition program for seniors.

Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem, leads that subcommittee and said she backs both bills. "Unless some unforeseen problems arise, I expect to pass them out," she said Monday.

A spokeswoman said the governor will sign SB 287 and hopes

the other two bills reach him, as well.

"We are extremely pleased the bill is heading to the governor for his signature, just in time to help feed hungry children this summer," said Tina Kotek, policy director for Children First for Oregon.

"The bipartisan support for the bill has been wonderful. This bill is a smart investment that will help meet immediate needs, help provide greater access to summer meals for kids in the future and bring more federal dollars into the state," she said. "This is a good day for Oregon's most vulnerable children."

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