

As a public school teacher I would submit that it is in the interests of all children in the state of Western Australia that we move to a system of healthy, cooked school dinners to be available for all school children.

First and foremost this would benefit children from the poorest and most disadvantaged homes. Far too often when dealing with students that are failing to focus on learning and/or showing behavioural difficulties, when I question them it turns out that they have not eaten breakfast nor have any lunch. Hunger is a real problem for a percentage of students from poorer and/or unstable home environments. By having healthy, cooked meals available for free to low socio-economic students, they would be guaranteed at least one nutritious, filling meal per day.

However, it would not be just this disadvantaged minority that would benefit, but the majority of students that are functionally undernourished. Many families are very busy these days, and when it comes to packing school lunches they pack for convenience. Most students I see eating at recess or lunch have food with low nutritional value that typically comes in a plastic packet. Frankenfoods like potato crisps, lollies, fruit roll-ups, popcorn, etc. These "foods" are full of preservatives, oil and sugar, and low in nutritional value. What is worse is that the plastic packaging is frequently discarded around the school, blown by the wind, and the best that can be hoped for is that it ends up in land fill. Having nutritious cooked meals in schools would mean students get to each a healthy meal each day that will aid their concentration in class rather than the high sugar foods that will undermine their concentration.

I believe families would be in strong support of healthy cooked meals in schools. The benefits would include better nutrition for students - especially those not getting enough nutrition at home - and better focus for learning in class, as well as a reduction in litter around schools (which the public pays for cleaners to dispose of). Children are in the process of developing their palate and dietary habits, and it would be good for their development to be exposed to healthy, cooked dinners as part of their growth into adulthood.

I submit that a move to healthy, cooked meals in schools is a reform that would be widely supported by the public and can't come too soon to our schools.