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Gregory-Portland Independent School District

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G-PISD Trustees Vote to Support Families by Funding Student Meals for the 2023-2024 School Year

Last night the Gregory-Portland ISD School Board voted in favor of funding student meals for next school year, 2023-2024, which will result in savings for families of up to \$1,000 per student – and a total district investment of up to \$1.4 Million. This is the second consecutive year that Trustees have approved covering costs for all student meals, as last year they approved funding for the current school year that has resulted in savings for families of up to \$1,000 per student for 2022-23.

“The standard practice for schools is to have families cover any cost for meals above and beyond contributions for those who qualify for free and reduced lunch,” said Jeff Atkinson, G-PISD Director of Food and Nutrition Services. “Because (G-PISD) received federal funding after Hurricane Harvey for several years, it’s been a long time since our families have had to pay out of pocket for meals.” Atkinson provided a report to the board that included meal pricing estimates – the amounts families would be paying if the board had not accepted a recommendation to fund all meals next year. Without this decision, many families not qualifying for any free and reduced lunch contributions would be spending up to \$4.45 per day per student for meals.

“At some point, we will have to return to the standard practice of families paying for meals. However, we are bringing this decision before the board at this time due to what we know our families are experiencing personally right now,” Atkinson said, citing economic inflation throughout the food industry has resulted in higher costs.

After the meeting, Superintendent Dr. Michelle Cavazos said she was delighted that the board approved this recommendation: “If we can find a way to pay for student meals at school, we have an obligation to consider doing so because it’s the right decision for our children. We know there are families who are trying to make ends meet with rising costs at grocery stores, gas pumps, and to keep the lights on at home. If we can make sure all students are fed while they are with us, and we realize the current economic climate is a struggle for our families, we need to do what we can to help.”

Board President Tim Flinn agreed, and said that uncommon times create opportunities to help others. “We won’t always be able to provide free student meals, and this time next year we’ll be looking at the options once again,” he said. “At some point, we know our district will have to return to having families pay for student meals. At some point, our district will also no longer be in a place to financially contribute in this way. However, we all felt that this was one thing we could do today to help everyone as inflation continues to affect all of our families. It was the right thing to do, and I’m glad we were united in this decision.”

Trustees voted 6-0, with one abstention*, to approve the investment of up to \$1.4 Million that will cover one (1) free breakfast and one (1) free lunch for every student each day next school year. With the board’s decision to fund meals for two consecutive years, and federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) contributions after Harvey in previous years, the last school year that G-PISD families had to pay out of pocket for student meals was 2016-2017.

More information about meal pricing, including estimated costs that families would have been paying for meals next year and in previous years, can be found at g-pisd.org/MealPricing.

**Trustee Dean Atkinson abstained from this vote due to the fact that the district’s Director of Food and Nutrition Services is his son Jeff Atkinson. Mr. Atkinson has historically abstained from voting on all food service business to avoid any potential conflict of interest.*

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