



# Wyoming Hunger Initiative eliminates school meal debt accrued during the first two weeks of school during transition back to pre-pandemic practices

**CHEYENNE, WYO** – First Lady Jennie Gordon’s Wyoming Hunger Initiative and the Meridian Trust North Star Foundation partnered to eliminate school meal debt accrued during the first two weeks of school while districts transitioned students into the free and reduced meal program through the National School Lunch Program. The amount of debt eliminated totaled \$17,232.71 across twenty-one school districts, which translates to 6,089 meals.

During the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, all students ate for free as part of the USDA waiver program introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the waiver, students who qualified for free and reduced meals were granted a transition period from the end of the previous school year into the new school year providing ample time to resubmit the necessary paperwork to qualify for another year of free and reduced meals. Due to the nature of the waiver during the pandemic, the grace period was no longer in place; students who had either never had to pay before due to their age or because they were on the free and reduced lunch program found themselves facing the full price cost of a meal on the first day of school.

In an effort to ease the minds of families across the state, Wyoming Hunger Initiative’s private partners pledged to eliminate any debt accrued during the first two weeks of school to allow ample time for families to complete the necessary paperwork for the 2022-2023 school year. These funds were set aside for school districts participating in the USDA’s National School Lunch Program who were actively working to re-enroll qualifying families.

“Wyoming Hunger Initiative is proud to partner with the Meridian Trust North Star Foundation to eliminate debt accrued during the first two weeks of school, giving parents the opportunity to fill out the necessary paperwork for the National School Lunch Program. Finding a Wyoming solution to a Wyoming challenge is always our priority,” said First Lady Jennie Gordon. “This ensures that our schoolchildren and their families will have one less thing to worry about as they come to school and can focus on learning.”

Wyoming Hunger Initiative continues to seek sustainable solutions to end hunger in Wyoming through innovative approaches to establishing a wide variety of critical partnerships and local solutions.

“You can feel the weight slip off parents’ shoulders when an organization such as Wyoming Hunger Initiative purposely steps in to alleviate lunch debt,” said Meridian Trust Federal Credit Union CEO Kim Withers. “This is why the people in our communities across the state readily join in to fight hunger.”

### **About Wyoming Hunger Initiative**

*Wyoming Hunger Initiative is the official initiative of Wyoming’s First Lady Jennie Gordon and is governed by the Board of Directors of the Wyoming Governor’s Residence Foundation, a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Visit [www.nohungerwyo.org](http://www.nohungerwyo.org) to learn more about Wyoming Hunger Initiative.*

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