



School Food Matters appreciates this opportunity to comment on the Public Consultation Paper – Independent Review of Education in Tasmania (September 2024). Whilst there are five main themes of the document – we would like to provide comment on Theme 2 – Strengthening supports and engagement for all learners at all stages of their education.

We know that Tasmania is facing considerable challenges in narrowing the disparities in health and education when compared to national benchmarks. This critical situation is emphasised by a range of statistics, revealing a landscape where urgent intervention and innovative approaches are needed to deliver significant improvements:

- Tasmania recorded the second lowest year 12 attainment rates of any jurisdiction, with only 53% completion compared to the national average of 76%.
- 50 per cent of Tasmania’s population has inadequate reading skills for their daily life needs.
- The prevalence of disadvantage in Tasmania exceeds national figures, compounding challenges in education and health.
- 63% of the Tasmanian population are in the overweight or obese range.
- Only 6% of the Tasmanian population are meeting the recommended vegetable intake.
- In 2023, one in two adult Tasmanians experienced some level of food insecurity.

These findings, drawn from the “Health and Wellbeing of Tasmania’s Children, Young People and their Families” report, the Tasmanian Population Health Survey 2022, the latest Report on Government Services (RoGS) 2024, and the Tasmanian Project Report by UTAS 2023, paint a comprehensive picture of the hurdles facing Tasmania. They highlight the urgency of innovative interventions to foster a healthier, more educated future for Tasmania.

Whilst a number of these reports provide data on Tasmanian adults, it is possible to extrapolate this data to reflect what children and young people are experiencing and therefore the need for breaking the cycle of disadvantage, poor health and low academic outcomes.

Our motto is “Supporting Communities to Thrive”. At the core of our mission is the belief that every Tasmanian child is entitled to a nutritious daily meal using local and seasonal produce. Over the past three years we have completed a pilot, funded by the State Government, to determine the feasibility of providing a cooked sit down lunch for over 4000 students at 30 schools each week. The pilot has been very successful and as a result this year, the State Government has expanded the pilot to become a program with another 30 schools coming on board by 2026. This expansion is based on a Business Case for the School Lunch Program developed through funding from the Tasmanian Community Fund and also the findings of School Lunch Project Evaluation Final Report 2024, Menzies Institute for Medical Research.

The School Lunch Program aims to establish a foundation for academic improvement, social development and overall healthier lifestyles. By ensuring a nutritious meal and communal dining time each day, we are addressing critical factors contributing to educational disparities, setting the stage for a future marked by equality and enhanced prospects for Tasmania’s children and youth.

One of the core benefits of the School Lunch Program is engaged learning. The School Lunch Program is dedicated to creating an equitable educational environment, by ensuring that every child has access to a nutritious meal at school. The program also aims to remove hunger and poor food choices as an obstacle to focus, engagement, and learning. It acknowledges that a well-nourished student is prepared to engage deeply with educational experiences and resources. The program is more than just about providing food and improving food literacy, it’s a commitment to every child, representing a significant investment in Tasmania’s future.

Feeding school children well with Tasmanian produce will alleviate children coming to school hungry and with no food to nourish them through the day, or even worse, children not coming to school because of the stigma of not having food for their lunchbox.

We look forward to further engagement as the Government undertakes the process of actioning the outcomes of the Independent Review of Education in Tasmania and we look forward to discussing this document further with you.

This submission was prepared on behalf of all schools in Tasmania and School Food Matters by Julie Dunbabin, School Lunch Program Manager and Kirsty Grierson, Executive Officer both of School Food Matters Contact details

julie@schoolfoodmatters.org.au

kirsty@schoolfoodmatters.org.au

ph: 62238023

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