

MC

Muskegon Chronicle

‘HORROR MOVIE’

IT WAS NO “MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS,” BUT FOR PASSENGERS ON THE AMTRAK WOLVERINE STRANDED NEAR BATTLE CREEK, THE ORDEAL WAS NO LAUGHING MATTER. **A7**

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NEW SCHOOL YEAR

Free meals this year are uncertain. Here’s some lunch advice.



Illustration by Adobe Stock

The Michigan Legislature has yet to approve a new K-12 budget, putting school meals in jeopardy.

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As Michigan families are preparing for the return to school, an essential question looms: What’s for lunch?

With the state’s K-12 budget unresolved long past its July 1 deadline, the future of universal, free school-provided breakfasts and lunches remains uncertain.

As parents weigh their options amid the impasse, nutrition experts are sharing practical advice on how to make smart lunch choices, whether meals are packed at home or served in the cafeteria.

LUNCH LADIES IN LIMBO

School-provided hot breakfasts and lunches have been free at Michigan public schools since the COVID-19 pandemic. Now in flux, the meals are important for ensuring students get fed, said Allegra Picano, a registered dietitian at Detroit-based Henry Ford Health who works in the pediatrics department.

“It’s no cost to the student or the parents, so it’s accessible,” Picano said.



Students gather in the cafeteria for lunch at Unionville-Sebewaing Elementary School in Sebewaing. *MLive.com files*

“There are certain dietary requirements that they have to meet. So, they have to have a certain source of whole grains in there, some fruits or vegetables, some sort of protein. So kids can get a free balanced meal at no cost to them, which is wonderful.”

Being fed a nutritious meal plays a direct role in how students flourish and how their brain operates in daily life, Picano said. Hungry students tend to lose focus in class, making proper nutrition essential, she said.

“It’s very important for any kid to have a lunch, whether or not it’s a packed lunch or a lunch provided at school,” said Dr. Tracey

Alperin, a University of Michigan Health pediatrician.

Dr. Ali Bazzi, a pediatrician at Corewell Health in Dearborn, said while schools are attempting to offer healthier options, many still serve “a lot of processed foods, a lot of extra sodium.”

MAKING MEALS

Picano suggested considering children’s preferences and dietary needs when deciding to eat the hot lunch or to pack a lunch. She advises packing some fruits and vegetables, if possible, so the child has a choice to eat the school lunch, or part of it, but doesn’t have to.

Picano doesn’t say either hot or cold lunch is outright better. She noted what is available for hot lunches may be limited, and because of school budgets, the vegetables and fruits might not be the freshest.

Still, you can trust the school to provide a “very well-balanced meal,” Picano said.

Alperin agreed. If parents have time and money to make a home-packed lunch and that’s the child’s preference, then that’s “wonderful,” she said. But parents should know the school-provided lunch is a nutritious option for their children.

Bazzi prefers packing lunches if possible, since school lunches still have many processed foods in them. That way, he said, parents can also track what their child is eating.

SEE NEW SCHOOL YEAR, A3

INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS

More than 100 bridges at risk of closure by 2035

Many are considered vital lifelines to Michigan communities.

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An I-94 bridge in southwest Michigan — over M-140 in Watervliet — has been rated in “poor” condition for more than 25 years.

It’s a critical corridor in and out of the Berrien County community, carrying about 43,000 vehicles every day. Without the bridge, local officials say the town’s businesses would be devastated.

Insufficient funding has put more than 100 state trunkline bridges at risk of closure by 2035, according to the Michigan Department of Transportation. Those potential closures would affect more than 1.8 million drivers daily statewide.

It’s not just bridges that demand more funding.

State officials said without a comprehensive transportation funding package, capital highway programs will support about 2,800 fewer construction jobs in 2026 than in 2025, and annual road funding will decline from \$495 million to about \$222 million.

“At this rate, by decade’s end, nearly 50% of state routes, which carry 53% of total traffic and 80% of commercial traffic, will be in poor condition,” MDOT Director

SEE INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS, A4

TRUMP’S PRESIDENCY

Coal plant order will cost 11 states’ utility customers

Consumers Energy argued the broader Midwest should be on the hook to run the plant under a Trump administration order.

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PORT SHELDON TOWNSHIP — Tens of millions of dollars in costs to keep an aging Michigan coal-fired power plant running past its intended shutdown date under a Trump administration order could fall on utility bills across the Midwest.

An order from federal energy regulators issued on Friday grants a request from J.H. Campbell plant owner Consumers Energy that the burden be distributed not just in Michigan, but also across 10 other states.

The action from the Federal Energy

SEE TRUMP’S PRESIDENCY, A4

Advice, B5 Classified, B10 Comics, B7 Local, A2 Michigan, A7 Obituaries, A8 Puzzles, B6 Sports, B1 Weather, B9 Your Money, A6
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