



**Letter in Support of HB 2760 and HB 2765  
February 27, 2018**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this letter in support of strong, modernized school breakfast programs through HB 2760 and HB 2765. My name is Bernadette Downey and I am a Senior Manager of Advocacy for Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign.

Share Our Strength is an organization committed to ending hunger and poverty. Through the No Kid Hungry campaign, we work to end hunger and food insecurity in America by connecting children to the nutrition programs, like school breakfast, that make sure they get the healthy food they need every day. In addition to our grant-making in all 50 states, we also work with schools, governors, state legislators and nonprofits to identify best practices and provide technical assistance. In Oregon, we are proud to collaborate with Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon on this work.

School breakfast is one of the most essential school supplies we can provide our students. Research shows that when kids start the day with a healthy meal, it can impact test scores, attendance rates, and classroom behavior as well as long-term health and eating habits.

Breakfast is especially important for kids who are at risk of hunger. An estimated 173,000 children in Oregon today live in families that struggle to afford enough food for everyone. Even more live in families on the brink, with enough today but only one financial emergency – an unexpected illness, a car repair or broken water heater – away from hunger.

For these kids, school breakfast is a game-changer. Consistent access to morning nutrition helps students start the day on a more equal footing. School breakfast is a simple, cost-effective way to fight hunger, improve educational outcomes and leverage new federal dollars.

Studies have linked important educational outcomes to breakfast programs served within the school day. Through a Deloitte study completed in 2013, we found that on average strong participation in the school breakfast program reduced classroom absenteeism and was connected to increases in math scores in standardized tests. Breakfast after the bell programs are linked to gradual decreases in students' office

disciplinary referrals and calmer classrooms, and improved students' behavior which we have also heard through teacher and principal feedback on the program. Across Oregon we hear similar feedback that a breakfast program that includes all students helps build a classroom routine, a calmer start to the morning, mitigates mid-morning disruptions associated with hunger, and keeps kids in the classroom who frequently visit the nurses office for headaches or stomach aches.

School Breakfast, however, is seriously under-utilized in Oregon. Oregon ranks just 31<sup>st</sup> in the nation in successfully connecting students to the free and reduced-price breakfast program, meaning more than 118,000 eligible students who need this meal are missing out.

Unlike the school lunch program that is embedded into the school day and reaches a larger portion of eligible children, the school breakfast program is traditionally served in the cafeteria before the school day starts.

Many families are dependent on school buses and public transportation, which makes it difficult for kids to get to school with enough time to stand in line and sit down with a tray before the school day starts. Further, students who arrive and eat school breakfast before the start of the school day risk the stigma of being labelled as "poor."

Around the country and the state, more schools have recognized these challenges and looked for ways to make breakfast more inclusive, making the meal a part of the school day and providing a broader array of serving methods that remove transportation challenges and stigma.

In the last seven years, breakfast participation has increased nationally by more than 22%, reaching an additional 2.3 million students. However we know we need to do more to reach the more than 2.9 million low-income children who are still missing out on this resource. In Oregon, while participation has increased, the rate of increase over the same period was only 5.7%, adding less than seven thousand students in the same time period.

This is a problem with a solution. Oregon has long been a leader in the anti-hunger space. Creating smart policies to modernize the school breakfast program, making it a seamless part of the school day and increasing access, would continue that momentum and position Oregon to be a leader among the states. Oregon could become the first state to offers meals to all kids at no charge, and join the eight states that have already passed breakfast after the bell legislation, allowing more kids access to this important meal.

Legislation can be an important tool for change. In fact, the states that first passed bipartisan legislation to ensure kids have access to school breakfast after the school bell rings now have the highest performing programs in the country. The success of these policies have led additional states to take legislative action and now eight states –

Nevada, New Mexico, Washington, Colorado, New York, New Jersey, Illinois, and the District of Columbia – have breakfast after the bell policies.

Nevada is one example. Breakfast participation doubled in the qualifying schools and the state's ranking jumped from 25<sup>th</sup> in the nation to 7<sup>th</sup> after the first year their Breakfast After the Bell legislation was implemented in schools. The state return on investment also more than doubled initial projections. For every \$1 in state investment, it generated \$8 in federal school breakfast reimbursement.

We have seen this approach work in rural and suburban communities across West Virginia, Colorado, and Nevada. We have seen this approach be successful no matter the school district size – from Boise School District in Iowa, to larger districts such as Los Angeles, Dallas, and New York. In Houston Independent School District, within the first year of implementation of their Breakfast After the Bell policy, schools reported increases in attendance and a decrease in disciplinary action.

We believe Oregon can make a meaningful impact by requiring high poverty schools to incorporate school breakfast into their school day, potentially adding an additional 18,000 eligible students to the program.

When children consistently get the healthy food they need, it helps them grow up smarter, healthier and stronger. And it takes smart, healthy, strong kids to build a smart, healthy, strong Oregon.

I thank the Committee for taking the time to focus on this important issue and I urge you to continue to make school breakfast a priority by voting favorably on HB 2760 and HB 2765.