



Date: February 27, 2019
To: House Education Committee, Chair Doherty and Members
From: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations Consultant
RE: HB 2760 [Universal School Meals]

On behalf of OEA's 45,000 members and the students they serve, it is my honor to testify in support of HB 2760, which will help the nearly 174,000 kids who come to school hungry. Our thanks to Chair Doherty and this committee for hearing this important bill.

Oregon is known for its vision and innovation – whether it's mandatory deposits, open beaches, housing policy, or family leave – we have been on the cutting edge of good policy for many decades. With HB 2760, Oregon could once again lead the nation by becoming the first state to offer meals to all students without charge. Why is this necessary?

Not only are too many of our kids dealing with poverty, but they are also kids – children whose bodies and minds depend on regular nutrition to thrive. They are kids in that they succumb to peer pressure, too, and one of the heartbreaking truths is that once they get to the middle and high school years, their desire to fit in too often eclipses their desire to eat, and so they sometimes do not fill out the free and reduced meal forms. Data from the Oregon Department of Education reflect this trend. Over a four-year period from 2015-16 to 2018-19, students across the state dropped off the free and reduced lunch roles consistently.

School Lunch Data for All Free and Reduced Lunch Enrollees, 2015-2019

Grade in 2015-16	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	ATTRITION	% LOSS
4 th graders	25,742	25,296	24,781	23,625	-2117	8%
5 th graders	24,683	23,149	23,138	22,104	-2579	10.4%
6 th graders	23,480	22,432	22,481	20,825	-2655	11.3%
7 th graders	22,524	21,808	21,452	19,923	-2601	11.5%
8 th graders	21,889	20,768	20,544	18,593	-3296	15%

Eight percent of the 2015 fourth graders had dropped enrollment in the program by the seventh grade. This trend continued consistently through the grades; fully 15 percent of 2015's eighth graders had dropped out of the food program four years later. While other factors – such as changing family status or students leaving school altogether – could account for some of this trend, we believe that middle and high school shaming plays a significant role in these numbers.

If all students are served meals, the stigma of family economic struggles becomes a non-issue.

Our members tell us that educational benefits also accrue to students who are able to receive meals at school. Their attendance improves, their thinking and focus are sharper, and they are able to learn more. This has longer term impact on their academic achievement across the board.

For all students – those who qualify for free and reduced meals, those close to the line who are still hungry, and those who do not suffer hunger – we believe HB 2760 is a great idea and hope it has your support

Thank you