



Date: May 5, 2021
To: Senate Education Committee, Chair Dembrow and Members
From: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations
RE: *HB 2536 [Student Access to Meals]*

On behalf of OEA's 41,000 members, I'm honored to testify in support of HB 2536, which will clarify what was intended when the Student Success Act of 2019 was enacted.

Of all the good that the Student Success Act will bring to our students as it fully rolls out, increasing access to nutritional meals for our students was one of the most moving accomplishments to educators. They often tell us that it is hard to teach a child who is hungry, hurting, or homeless. By expanding the Community Eligibility Program and raising the school nutrition access threshold to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, it was our intent as members of the group who worked to write and pass this landmark legislation that all eligible students would be able to access free meals.

Unfortunately, the wording of the law failed to make explicit that this was the intent. Instead, the language is being interpreted in a way that leaves it up to schools to opt into the program, rather than participate by default. It was our intent that the small number of districts not able to offer meals would opt out instead. Depending on their zip codes, some students are more likely to face hunger because of this error. We agree with the requesters of the bill that it is simply more efficient to assume statewide, equitable access is the standard, allowing for automatic eligibility of all schools falling into the legal criteria for this program.

We believe that other technical fixes to the nutrition program, corrected in HB 2060, are harmonious with this legislation, and that the two concepts will work together to fine-tune student nutrition service programs in our schools.

Thank you for your support for this important correction.