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Kate Brown, Governor



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Colt Gill

Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction

HB 2536 - Strengthening Access to School Meals

Senate Education Committee

May 4, 2021

Chair Dembrow, Vice-Chair Thomsen, and members of the Senate Education Committee, I am Jessica Ventura, Government Relations Director for the Oregon Department of Education. I am pleased to write this letter in support of HB 2536, which clarifies the intent of the school meals program within the [Statewide Initiatives Account](#) created by the Student Success Act ([HB 3427](#), 2019).

Background:

[HB 3427](#) (SSA) codified state reimbursements for those students eligible for reduced price meals. The bill also requires breakfast to be offered after the start of the school day under certain conditions. Additionally, the SSA requires breakfast and lunch to be offered at no charge to eligible students above the level of eligibility of the federal regulations as a condition of receiving state funds, but does not require schools to make these students eligible for meals at no charge.

House Bill 2536

HB 2536 changes some of the existing Child Nutrition Incentives included in the Student Success Act of 2019 by making the state income guidelines the default, rather than optional. HB 2536 requires qualifying schools to recognize students eligible for meals at no cost using the Oregon Expanded Income Guidelines (EIG). Students who qualify through this EIG method are a portion of the students who are not federally eligible for free or reduced meals. Those eligible under the EIG will likely experience decreased food insecurity, increased access to nutrient dense foods, and will be prevented from incurring meal charges. Requiring schools to recognize eligibility at 300 percent of the federal poverty level will ensure that reimbursements are covering those with the highest need beyond those qualifying for free and reduced meals. The bill clarifies language to be aligned with federal law so as not to confuse certain categories of eligible students. It corrects the reimbursement amount per meal, waives the requirement for schools to offer meals at no charge to eligible students if ODE has insufficient funds for the reimbursements, and directs ODE to establish a process for determining and notifying schools if funds are not available to support making EIG mandatory.

ODE urges the committee to support HB 2536.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jessica Ventura

Government Relations Director