

Submitter: Brynn Richardson

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3435

As the director of a district that is 100% CEP, I would like to speak directly on the positive impacts that universal meals has on our district.

Many of our students start their school days hungry, possibly having had their last meal served to them at school the previous school day.

Providing access to no cost meals at school meets some of their most basic needs. Students served free meals at school have better health outcomes, better academic outcomes and reduced stigma regarding their family's economic status. It also supports nutrition departments, as they see increased participation at meals.

Providing us crucial funding for menu development and facilities maintenance.

A universal meal program through our state will ensure access to free meals for all students with no hoops to jump through. Meal applications represent a barrier for many families. They can be filled out incorrectly, missed entirely or reach a determination of Paid, simply by \$1 a month. In addition, meal applications in high need school districts are a huge administrative burden.

Our department has been greatly changed by the CEP program. Previously, our budget paid for 1 FTE dedicated towards meal application processing. Since becoming CEP, these hours have been allocated towards other department initiatives such as menu development and staff training. Implementing free meals in Oregon helps ensure our ability to focus on feeding the kids instead of determining their eligibility for meals.

As mentioned earlier, students with access to free meals at schools have better health outcomes. School meals provide increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables and a wider variety of foods than students have at home. Our district employs a monthly program where we promote locally sourced, culturally significant foods at lunch. This widens students knowledge of foods from other communities and again, promotes a more varied diet. Diets high in variety are known to promote key indicators of health.

Bringing free school meals to Oregon addresses the needs of our states students and families. It will ensure our state is promoting better learning environments and healthier outcomes for our children.

Thank you for your time,
Brynn Richardson