

Submitter: Charity Ralls  
On Behalf Of:  
Committee: House Committee On Education  
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB3435

I am writing to strongly support HB 3435 to make school meals available to all Oregon students at no cost. I am the administrator of the school nutrition department for the Beaverton School District and have observed the many benefits of offering free meals for all students in our district this year under the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP).

This past year we went from 15 schools to all 53 schools in Beaverton SD offering free meals for all students. From 16,429 students having access to free meals through all methods (applications, direct certification, CEP) to 36,730 students able to access free meals without a need for an application.

Our breakfast participation has increased by 77% and we now regularly serve more than 1 in 5 students breakfast every day. Our lunch participation has increased 39% and we serve over 53% of all students lunch every day.

The participation of our low-income students has increased by 15% now that all students can eat for free. By removing the stigma from participating in school meals students who may benefit the most from school meal programs are participating at higher numbers.

CEP has allowed us to streamline our process and eliminate burdensome and confusing paperwork that prevented many families from applying for meal benefits. We no longer spend hours each week trying to reach out to families regarding applications or helping them fill out information.

Students no longer have negative balances, and we no longer need to send notifications to parents about balances owed. We no longer make phone calls to parents to encourage applying for benefits or remind them about their negative balances. We have decreased our office staff and instead have shifted those resources to kitchens to provide direct services to our students.

We strictly follow no lunch shaming policies, but students were often aware that their parents received notifications or may worry that they were increasing meal debt if they choose to eat at school. Even students who were eligible for free meals worried about meal debt and chose not to eat over that concern. Newly enrolled students receive free meals immediately and no longer must wait to apply and receive notification of benefit approval.

Due to the increase in participation under CEP we have been able to discontinue our sales of a la carte items at our middle schools. In the past sales of a la carte snack items were essential to maintain our budget, but moving to free meals has allowed us to eliminate these sales and instead focus solely on providing nutritious meals for all students. This has also had a positive impact on student behavior during meal services.

We regularly hear from students of all ages how much they like and appreciate that meals are free for all students.

I fully support free meals for all students and encourage the passage of HB 3435 so that we can continue offering free meals for all students in Oregon.

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