



2/24/2024

TO: House Committee on Education

FROM: FoodCorps

SUBJECT: Yes on HB 3435

Dear Chair Neron, Vice-Chair McIntire, Vice-Chair Dobson, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Aaron Poplack, and I am the Oregon Impact and Partnership Lead at FoodCorps. I am also a lifelong Oregon resident, and a former Portland Public Schools student. FoodCorps is in strong support of HB 3435, School Meals for All, which would ensure that every Oregon child can show up nourished and ready to learn, regardless of where they live in the state or how much money their parents make.

[FoodCorps](#) is a national non-profit with a vision for every child to experience the joy and power of food in school. For 13 years we have partnered with Oregon communities to place emerging leaders in schools to teach food and nutrition education, support school gardens, and introduce and expose children to nutritious foods in the cafeteria setting by encouraging them to try new things. Annually, we have 7 FoodCorps AmeriCorps service members who support access to food education and nourishing school meals in over 33 high need schools across 6 school districts in Oregon. FoodCorps also provides leadership to Oregon's Farm to School Network, and sits on the Steering Committee for the School Meals for All Campaign.

An empty stomach can't be ignored. When you're hungry - it's the focus and there's not much more capacity to focus on anything else let alone learn. Research confirms that hungry students can't learn, but just talk to any of the teachers we work with and they'll tell you the same. The reality is that 1 in 6 children in Oregon struggle with food insecurity and many families are feeling the pinch in their wallet right now with inflated food costs and economic uncertainty. Families are falling through the cracks and students are impacted the most. We level the playing field for students by providing them library books, school field trips, and a bus ride to school, so why don't we do so with school meals?

Food is also a powerful tool for connection to community when it is accessible, nourishing, and affirming. Districts across the state are reimagining the school food experience through meals. In Umatilla, our FoodCorps members collaborated with students to design a pozole recipe for their school menu, and students regularly have the chance to eat tamales that are locally sourced from [Salsas Locas](#). This past December, I spent the afternoon with students in David Douglas cafeterias ate purple potatoes that were served on the lunch line, while chatting with the farmer who grew them in Boring, OR.

Get Involved
foodcorps.org

Connect
info@foodcorps.org

Follow Us
[@foodcorps](https://www.instagram.com/foodcorps)

These are the meals and experiences that are possible when no-cost meals are available. **Increased participation in those meals brings in more revenue for the school nutrition department to support more choice, fresher local foods, and enhancements to the cafeteria experience.** School meals for all is a driver in the economic success of our local businesses, especially farmers. When school food services can count on income for the meals, they can buy more locally produced foods. It's a virtuous cycle and one that pays dividends in school performance, student well-being, and a resilient food system in Oregon.

I urge you to support HB 3435 and ensure that no child in Oregon has to learn when they're hungry.

Sincerely,

Aaron Poplack
Oregon Impact and Partnership Lead
FoodCorps
aaron.poplack@foodcorps.org