



Testimony to the Oregon House Education Committee in Support of HB 3435: School Meals for All

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

My name is David Wieland, and I am submitting testimony on behalf of the School Meals for All Coalition in strong support of HB 3435, which seeks to ensure School Meals for All students in Oregon.

Together, we're building a movement for school meals in Oregon that reflects our values as Oregonians. No matter where they live in the state, a child shouldn't experience hunger at school. With the passage of the Student Success Act in 2019, Oregon led the way in addressing child hunger and nutrition through school meals. The pandemic further proved that universal school meal policies are overwhelmingly popular, simple, and achievable. As of January 2025, nine other states have passed Universal School Meals for All policies. Oregon has the opportunity to lead again by passing HB 3435 and solidifying a statewide commitment to universal school meals.

No student in Oregon should go hungry at school, no matter where they live or how much money their family makes. Yet, tens of thousands of students remain in schools with a stratified meal system, including those in rural areas where hunger is disproportionately high but less concentrated. Research shows that food insecurity is a barrier to academic success, with hungry children more likely to experience difficulty focusing, increased absenteeism, and lower academic achievement (Gundersen et al., 2012).

Food is just as essential to academic success as buses and textbooks. We don't ask families to pay out of pocket for these essentials, and we shouldn't for school meals either. Studies consistently show that universal free meal programs improve student nutrition, well-being, and cognitive function (Bartfeld et al., 2019).

This is not just about food access but about ending bias in our schools. A tiered meal system signals class differences to students, teachers, and administrators, reinforcing stigma and shame. Research indicates that eliminating meal charges reduces stigma, improves student behavior, and fosters a healthier school climate (Poppendieck, 2010).

Every child deserves an equal opportunity to succeed, yet 1 in 6 children in Oregon doesn't have enough food to eat, with rates 2-3 times higher for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous children (Oregon Hunger Task Force, 2022). These disparities are rooted in systemic inequities, and school meal policies that ensure all children are fed are a step toward racial equity and educational justice.

School meals have far-reaching benefits beyond the school day. Providing breakfast and lunch to all students has been linked to improved diet quality, better mental health outcomes, and reduced in-school suspensions (Cohen et al., 2021). The cognitive and behavioral benefits are especially pronounced for low-income students, who may lack consistent access to nutritious meals at home.

We will eliminate unequal access to school meals for children in Oregon, improve school food practices, and support thriving communities throughout the food system. School Meals for All is a coalition of students, school and community leaders, teachers and cafeteria workers, parents, food producers, and other advocates working together to secure a values-aligned, universal school meal program for Oregon.

We urge you to pass HB 3435 this legislative session so that every child in Oregon has the food they need to grow, learn, and thrive.

Thank you for your leadership and your commitment to Oregon's children.

Sincerely,

David Wieland
Coalition Lead, School Meals for All Coalition
Policy Advocate, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon

Steering Committee



Coalition Endorsers

- Active Children Portland
- American Federation of Teachers – Oregon (AFT-OR)
- American Heart Association
- Baby Blues Connection
- Black Parent Initiative
- Beyond Toxics

- Center for Childhood Safety and Wellbeing
- Coalition of Oregon School Administrators
- Danish Honey Farms LLC
- Ecotrust
- Food Research & Action Center
- FoodCorps
- Grow Portland
- Growing Gardens
- Hillsboro Youth Advisory Council
- Instacart
- Milk Crate Kitchen
- Multnomah County
- National Farm to School Network
- Next Up Action Fund
- Oregon Alliance of YMCAs
- Oregon Association of Relief Nurseries
- Oregon Association of Student Councils
- Oregon Environmental Council
- Oregon Farm to School Network
- Oregon Food Bank
- Oregon Primary Care Association
- Oregon Pediatric Society
- Oregon PTA
- Oregon Education Association
- Oregon School Employees Association
- Oregon School Nutrition Association
- Oregon School Nurses' Association
- Oregon School-Based Health Alliance
- Oregon Sexual Assault Task Force
- Our Children Oregon
- Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon
- Portland Backpack
- Prevent Child Abuse Oregon
- Rogue Valley Farm to School
- Southern Oregon Success
- The Beet Food System
- Umpqua Valley Farm to School
- Urban League of Portland
- United Way of Columbia County
- Vision To Learn
- Washington County Kids
- Women's Foundation of Oregon

- Zenger Farm
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- Cohen, J. F. W., Hecht, A. A., McLoughlin, G. M., et al. (2021). Universal school meals and associations with student participation, attendance, and academic outcomes. *Nutrients*.
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