

Date: February 24th, 2025

To: House Committee on Education

From: Nick Keough, Political and Legislative Organizer, AFT-Oregon

Re: Support for HB 3435: Schools Meals for All

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

AFT-Oregon is a federation of 27 local unions representing 18,000 education workers across early learning, K-12 classified, community colleges, and public universities. Today, our labor federation is writing to express our **enthusiastic support of HB 3435: Schools Meal for All**, which would ensure free breakfast and lunches are offered to every K-12 student in Oregon.

As an organization that represents educators and staff across Oregon's public education system, we believe that **no child should go hungry at school** – regardless of where they live or how much their family earns. Today, in Oregon, thousands of students experience hunger at school, impacting their ability to learn, grow, and reach their full potential.

Food is just as fundamental to student success as school buses, textbooks, and classrooms. We don't expect families to pay for those essentials, and we shouldn't expect them to pay for school meals either. While many students in Oregon benefit from no-cost school meal programs, tens of thousands remain excluded – particularly those in schools with the highest wealth disparities and in rural communities where food insecurity is disproportionately high.

The research is clear: providing school meals for all reduces childhood hunger, improves health outcomes, supports working families, and advances racial and economic equity. Studies overwhelmingly show that ensuring universal access to school meals leads to higher academic achievement, better cognitive function, and even improved behavior in the classroom. Additionally, school meal programs reduce suspensions at rates comparable to restorative justice initiatives, demonstrating their far-reaching benefits beyond academics.

School Meals for All is an investment in Oregon's future. This legislation will:

- Guarantee free breakfast and lunch to all students, eliminating stigma and barriers to

access.

- Maximize federal reimbursement dollars to support program sustainability.
- Provide additional state funding to ensure high-quality meals that meet strong nutrition standards.
- Equip schools with the resources and infrastructure needed for successful implementation.
- Eliminate school meal debt, lifting a financial burden off families.

Oregon is on the cusp of ensuring that no child goes hungry at school – we must see this effort through. It is time that Oregon ensures that every child, in every school, has access to the nutrition they need to thrive. **We urge the legislature to pass HB 3435: School Meals for All. Thank you for your time and consideration.**

Signed,

AFT-Oregon

<https://www.aft-oregon.org/about-aft-oregon>