



February 3, 2026

TO: Senate Committee On Education
FROM: Our Children's Oregon
RE: Support for SB 1581, School Meals for All

Dear Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, and members of the Committee,

My name is David Wieland, I am the Policy and Advocacy Director with Our Children Oregon. We champion equitable policies and opportunities for every child by leveraging data and research. School Meals for All has consistently been a priority for members of the Children's Agenda, where we bring over 135 child serving organizations across the state to build a shared agenda.

This body's investment in school meals has taken us so far. The Student Success Act framework to support universal meal programs was built off of a federal program known as the Community Eligibility Program, designed for low income schools, wisely leveraging as many federal dollars as possible. As of today, only about 21 of the 1,200 public schools in Oregon are not serving meals to any student who needs one. Why? It's not that they don't want to participate, they're not eligible for the specific CEP program.

Senator Neron Misslin's legislation recognizes these unique use cases, allows all schools to participate, and directs ODE to ensure that schools are maximizing federal funding while participating in a separate federally funded universal meal program that any district can participate in. Every student in Oregon deserves the certainty that they will not go hungry at school, regardless of their income or town.

I understand where we're at – In times of resource scarcity, it's natural to take a step back and ask, are we targeting these investments to the children that need it most? And I think there's a strong case to be made that School Meals for All, including at high income districts, is a targeted investment needed at this moment.

First, our high income school districts contain thousands of middle and low income families that would benefit from school meals for all. Even in Lake Oswego School District, 1 in 8 students are on Medicaid, SNAP, or TANF. Few of those students participate in the income based school lunch programs – it's a laser mark of being a poor student in a rich school. And the artificially low federal poverty line for free meals is missing thousands of working families in high cost of living areas who would immensely benefit from the estimated \$1,400 per child, per year

replacement cost of these meals.

Second, we know that implementing universal school meal programs are an equalizer across many metrics: data shows that it's as effective as a restorative justice program in reducing suspensions in Oregon. Not only are hungry students not a disruption in class, but research shows that low income students are no longer clearly identified on a daily basis in the lunch line, leading to less bullying and conflict. Absenteeism decreases, test scores increase, and more. It's an equalizing force for students across every district.

We thank you for your time and efforts to improve outcomes for children in Oregon. We urge your support for SB 1581.

David Wieland
Policy and Advocacy Director
Our Children Oregon