



## **PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS NUTRITION SERVICES**

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*Providing delicious, high quality, nutrient-rich meals in support of student learning*

To: House Committee on Education  
From: Gitta Grether-Sweeney, Sr. Director, Nutrition Services  
Subject: Statement of support for HB 2652  
Date: February 12, 2017

Portland Public Schools is submitting this letter in support of HB 2652.

Portland Public Schools was one of the first early adopters of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Program, and with 25 current CEP schools, has the largest number of schools approved for CEP in the state. As with early adopters, Portland Public Schools immediately saw the benefits of the program as well as the areas in which change was needed. One of the areas of change included the financial commitment of the district in order to implement and support CEP in the schools regardless of whether they qualified for the program.

CEP has had a positive impact on the cafeteria environment by allowing all students to eat at no charge, reducing the stigma that is attached to eating school meals. Specifically, Portland Public Schools saw participation double by high schools alone even with an open campus. Parents visiting their students' schools during registration cried and were overwhelmingly grateful when finding out that the cost of school meals would be taken care of for them. CEP has reduced barriers for families seeking assistance by streamlining processes, eliminating paperwork and allowing families to participate in programs for which they already qualify. Families attending these schools who do not qualify for free and reduced priced meals also benefit from CEP. These families often struggle to financially cover all of their expenses and are making hard choices as to whether to pay to heat their home or purchase food. With cuts to assistance benefits like SNAP, increasing children's access to food covers the gap often needed for families.

Due to federal rules regarding boundary changes and grade changes to CEP schools, Portland Public Schools is facing the removal of 15 out of the 25 CEP schools for the 2017-18 school year. Without additional support and funding, the district cannot support the ongoing additional costs (~\$1 million per year) to maintain the CEP status at these 15 schools. This is not ideal - it is not what is best for students, but realistically, the district cannot sustain funding this model while continuing to provide all programs and quality services to all students. This change means that instead of over 12,000 students eating at no charge, only 4,400 students would be able to participate in this program, which is a loss and decrease in benefits for over 7,600 students.

This bill would help districts continue to provide the best services for Oregon students, allowing families to focus on their students' academic success rather than where their next meal is coming from. Child Nutrition Programs ensure that students are well nourished and ready to learn when they can be implemented and supported to their fullest extent. CEP programs can be the model for how school meals can be – focusing on nourishing the child rather than their economic status and whether or not they have money to eat.

Portland Public Schools supports HB 2652 with the caveat that the funding source be separate and distinct from the State School Fund.