

Submitter: Brynn Richardson

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1581

Oregon is in many ways, behind the tide implementing Universal Meals. This leaves our students vulnerable to a myriad of negative impacts with impending SNAP and Medicaid cuts notwithstanding cost of living increases that continue to leave many Oregonians seeing their incomes get them less and less far each month.

We have an opportunity to offer security to our students and families ensuring that students have access to breakfast and lunch at school. I write this as a parent and as a School Nutrition professional.

With the expanded adoption of CEP in our state, our family has benefited by having access to free meals at school, something that we previously did not qualify for, but are truly grateful to have!

As a School Nutrition Professional I cannot underestimate the value and benefit of application-less free meals. Families no longer run up debt to feed their children at school. Nor do they have to be encumbered by a sometimes difficult meal application process.

For us Administrators our time not spent processing and verifying applications is now spent where it should be-revitalizing school meal programs. For me this means, developing recipes that get scratch cooking into our school kitchens. These scratch recipes utilize our USDA commodity foods, supporting American Agriculture during a time when our school meal programs offer a lifeline to farmers being impacted by tariffs.

I also have time to develop relationships with local producers. Supporting small farms and keeping funds going through our community in a time when Federal cuts have limited or eliminated access to other support programs for these same farmers.

Our District maintains 75%+ participation in our Lunch program since adopting CEP district-wide. We are incredibly thankful to support our District families in this way. As we are also proud that we can support our students learning by avoiding the distraction of an empty tummy. Our students cannot afford to lose access to these free meals, especially at a time when Oregon sees improvement in its graduation rate. In my mind, there is no question that increased access to meals has played a role in this upward trend statewide.

As you can see, Universal Meals have practical implications tied to student success and family wellness, but they also play a vital role in supporting our producers.

Helping to grow our local economy while feeding our students.

Thank you for your time,

Brynn Richardson
School Nutrition Manager, David Douglas School District