

Submitter:

Michelle Hsu

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Education

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB1581

Chair Frederick, Vice-Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

My name is Michelle Hsu, and I live in Eugene, Oregon. I am submitting testimony in strong support of SB 1581: School Meals for All. The 4J School District has been providing free meals since the 2023-24 school year as a matter of equity. 4J students can receive free breakfast and lunch to the great benefit of the district's schools.

SB 1581 ensures that every student can access breakfast and lunch at all schools in Oregon at no cost, regardless of income. This is a critical step to addressing hunger during an affordability crisis and ensuring that students can focus on learning rather than worrying about food.

I am especially encouraged that SB 1581 makes breakfast accessible after the start of the school day, recognizing that many students arrive late due to transportation barriers or family work schedules. Allowing breakfast to be served in the classroom and counted as instructional time ensures students are nourished without losing valuable learning time.

The bill also reduces administrative burdens for schools by eliminating meal applications, income verification, and unpaid meal debt collection. Just as importantly, it protects students from stigma and meal shaming, helping create school environments rooted in dignity, equity, and inclusion.

At schools where breakfast and lunch are offered freely, like at the Village School in Eugene, students are provided meals and never be denied food for any reason. My own kids, the youngest graduated in 2023, would sometimes run out of money on their meal plan and would miss meals. Attempting to learn when you're hungry is simply adding barriers to childhood well-being and education. Universal meals matter for equity and health.

Research and lived experience consistently show that when students have reliable access to nutritious food, schools see improved attendance, fewer disciplinary incidents, and stronger academic outcomes. SB 1581 is a smart investment in Oregon's students and our future.

With only a small number of schools remaining before Oregon becomes a Hunger-Free Schools state, I urge you to vote YES on SB 1581 and ensure that no child in Oregon goes hungry at school.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

Sincerely,

Michelle Hsu

Former 4J School Board Member and current Researcher