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Date: February 5, 2026  
To: Senate Education Committee  
From: Parasa Chanramy, COSA  
Subject: Testimony in Support of [Senate Bill 1581](#)

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Good Morning, Chair Frederick, Vice Chair Weber, and Members of the Senate Education Committee:

**On behalf of the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators, we urge your support of SB 1581 and the forthcoming -2 amendment. We are part of the School Meals for All Coalition and believe that this bill is critical to ensuring that all students in Oregon are able to access meals in school, regardless of family income or zip code.**

Oregon is so close to becoming the next state to offer universal school meals. Currently, 98% of our public schools offer meals at no-cost to students and their families. This bill, along with the additional, sustainable investments in school meals, will help bring us to the finish line.

As we navigate the ripple effects of HR 1, and compounding human crises, our public schools are being called upon to help support the health and nutrition needs of our students as the federal social safety net programs our communities rely on are cut.

**SB 1581 will help: i) support and streamline access to free school meals (for example, expanding Breakfast After the Bell); and ii) maximize federal reimbursements. Along with this bill, it is critical that we continue to ensure that there's stable and sustainable funding to support the expansion.**

**School meals matter and make a difference for students, families, staff, and school communities.** Expanding access to free school meals reduces the stigma and financial burden students and families face, alleviates the administrative and paperwork burden on our school nutrition teams navigate so that they can focus more time on meal planning, preparation, and service, and most importantly, ensures that our students – regardless of income or zip code – have access to nutritious meals so that they can fully participate and be successful in school.

For reference, last session I gathered examples from over 30 school districts across the state sharing how access to free school meals has been a game changer for students and school communities. Please see the next several pages for those district examples.

**Thank you again for your time today. We urge you to vote YES on Senate Bill 1581 with the forthcoming -2 amendment.**



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**Alsea School District:** “Alsea School District offers free breakfast and lunch to all students, some of whom travel up to 1.5 hours each way to school. To improve access to morning meals, the district utilized *Breakfast After the Bell* funding to purchase additional equipment to expand meal options. As part of this initiative, the district redesigned its daily schedule to offer breakfast both before and after the official start of the school day. As a result, breakfast participation increased, supporting greater student readiness and engagement.”

**Astoria School District:** “In the Astoria community, there are many children whose only source of nutritious meals is from school-provided meals. The Astoria area also has a very high cost of living and offering free meals to all students relieves some of the financial burdens on families and allows them to use the money for other things that they may need. The District can assure that all students will receive at least two meals a day before going home. Behavioral and academic problems decrease when students are fed nutritious meals at school. Students who are hungry have a very hard time focusing. Many students don’t have healthy food at home, like fresh fruits and vegetables or whole grains. By eating school meals, it helps them build healthy eating habits.”

**Bend-La Pine School District:** “For Bend-La Pine Schools, we saw immediate benefits from our district-wide expansion of no-fee breakfast and lunch for students. Many families have expressed gratitude for removing the obligation to pay for school meals, particularly those which previously fell short of qualifying for meal benefits. A greater percentage of our students are eating school meals now. Our breakfast service has increased significantly, letting students start their learning day with a nutritious meal. And because we no longer need to verify the status of each student in line, kids are getting their food quickly, giving them more time to eat and socialize. We also believe this change has reduced the stigma of socio-economic status within schools by removing the perception that going to the cafeteria indicates economic need. Finally, our school and district staff no longer devote countless hours to required tracking and reporting of students eating free or reduced-price meals, and we’re free of the awkward burden of collecting on school meal debt.”

**Bethel School District:** “As Superintendent of the Bethel School District, I have seen firsthand the transformative impact of universal free meals for students. Bethel is a vibrant and diverse community, with many families who have historically qualified for free and reduced-price meals. Through the Community Eligibility Program, we’ve been able to provide every student with access to nutritious meals, eliminating barriers and reducing the stigma often associated with meal assistance. This has led to greater participation, improved attendance, and a stronger sense of belonging for all students. When children no longer worry about their next meal, they can focus on learning to read, solving complex problems, and thinking critically. Expanding this program across Oregon would ensure every student has the nourishment they need to thrive—academically, socially, and emotionally.”



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**Canby School District:** "The ability to feed all of our children breakfast and lunch in Canby School District through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) is transformative. For many children in our care, school is the only place they receive a guaranteed well-balanced meal. To date this year, we have served 30,000 more meals for children during breakfast (an increase of 71%) and 46,000 more meals for children at lunch (an increase of 37%). This commitment removes financial barriers for families and provides an important opportunity to fuel young brains and reinforce learning."

**Cascade School District:** "At Cascade School District, free meals for every student is a game changer! All students have the opportunity to start their day focusing on academics and not on how hungry they may be. Food insecurity runs high in South East Marion County. By being able to offer meals to all our students it takes the stigma off of our students who depend on meals to stay healthy during the school year. It allows for all our students to be ready to improve academically regardless of their socio-economic background. After working in schools for over 30 years, this program is one of the most effective ways that the state government can help K-12 education support all students. I have seen the positive effects first hand. Please make sure that school meals for all students continue to help us achieve our academic goals."

**Central School District 13J:** "At Central School District, the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows us to offer meals to all students at no charge to them or their families since September 2022. This benefit has improved the lives of many of our students and families. Removing the significant financial barrier to student nutrition fuels their educational success and learning journey. CEP promotes a feeling of belonging and self-worth for students. It removes the stigma of "free and reduced" school lunch. It opens school lunch to all students. Students no longer need to spend their time and emotional capital worrying if they will have food. They no longer need to be hungry while trying to learn. School meals are often the most nutritionally balanced meals that many students get. Another benefit of CEP is that our Nutrition Department staff are able to shift valuable time and resources formerly spent on administrative paperwork directly to kitchens where we serve our students every day. CEP has been an unmitigated success as a benefit to our community."

**Colton School District:** "The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) ensures every child in the Colton School District gets a no cost breakfast and lunch at school. This helps families by reducing expenses and gives kids the nutrition they need to stay focused and learn effectively. This year, we've increased the number of meals served at breakfast and lunch, making a meaningful impact on students' well-being."



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**Coos Bay School District:** “Coos Bay is a district with one of the highest rates of poverty in the state. For many of our students, the meals they receive at school are the most reliable food they will get all day. Ensuring access to both breakfast and lunch is essential if we are to meet our academic mission. When students are nourished, they are more likely to attend school, stay engaged, and reach their full academic potential. When they are hungry, learning simply cannot happen. By removing financial and logistical barriers — like meal applications and income-based eligibility. Free meals reduces stigma, supports struggling families, and allows schools to focus on instruction rather than paperwork. This bill would provide much-needed relief to both families and school personnel and help us ensure that every student is known by name, strengths, and needs—and that all students graduate with a plan: Enrolled, Employed, or Enlisted. In short, we cannot reach our academic goals without first meeting our students’ basic needs.”

**Creswell School District:** “At Creswell, our schools' poverty levels are typically 40-45% and providing school meals has been instrumental in ensuring all students have access to nutritious food, enhancing their ability to focus and succeed academically. The program has positively impacted our community by supporting students' health and well-being.”

**Crow-Applegate-Lorane School District:** “At Crow-Applegate-Lorane, free school meals ensure that all 300 of our students, regardless of their family's financial situation, have access to the nutrition they need to focus and succeed in the classroom. By providing meals to every child, we eliminate the stigma and processing burden that can come with free or reduced-price programs, allowing students to feel a sense of belonging rather than worry about affordability. When all students share the same meals, it strengthens school culture, fosters community, and supports a positive learning environment.”

**David Douglas School District:** “In David Douglas, we know that free meals for all students produces positive outcomes for students physical health, academic success and emotional wellbeing. Students that have access to free meals at school, increase their daily consumption of fruits and vegetables and have a more varied diet. We also know that when all students are offered free meals there is a reduced stigma on students who may have a lower economic status than their peers. Currently, our district receives a free reimbursement rate for all our students. This is a federal payment. Last year we received increased reimbursement rates through the state Community Eligibility and Expanded Income Group programs, but with our new 100% CEP agreement we no longer receive those payments. We have seen that universal meals do increase participation. The most recent change would be for Arthur Academy and Community Transition Program as they were not covered under the CEP program until the 2024-25 school year. All of our other schools have been CEP for 3 years (including this school year).”



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**Eugene 4J School District:** "Oregon has the opportunity to lead with vision by continuing to fund inclusive, stigma-free meal access that helps students show up, focus, and learn. As a school district already committed to meeting students where they are, we've seen the critical role that universal access to school meals plays in reducing hunger, supporting learning, and eliminating stigma. Since implementing free meals for all students, Eugene School District 4J has seen high school meal participation increase by 566%. This not only improved student nutrition but also positively impacted attendance in the period directly following lunch."

**Forest Grove School District:** "The impact of school meal programs in the Forest Grove School District has been significant and far-reaching. In the 2023–24 school year, the district served an average of more than 5,200 meals each day, totaling over 900,000 breakfast and lunch meals—and we are on pace to surpass that total in 2024–25. During summer 2024 alone, over 25,000 meals were provided to students, ensuring continued support when school was out. Since implementing the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) district-wide, participation has surged—high school meal counts increased by more than 50% in the second half of the year. In a district of fewer than 6,000 students, these numbers are remarkable. More importantly, they reflect a deep and ongoing commitment to student wellness, equity, and the belief that every child learns better when they are nourished and cared for."

**Grants Pass School District:** "I want to share with you the incredible benefits of the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) that has positively impacted our district. Since its implementation, we have seen a remarkable increase in the number of meals served, with a significant rise in both breakfast and lunch participation rates. Breakfast meals have spiked by 29%, while lunch meals have surged by an impressive 72%. This surge in meal participation demonstrates the vital role that CEP plays in ensuring that all students have access to nutritious meals throughout the school day. This access is not only important for their academic performance but also for their overall well-being. It is estimated that this could save families up to \$1,200 annually per student, making it a crucial policy for our community. These meals reduce grocery bills, and provide our students the nutritious meals they need to grow and learn."

**Hillsboro School District:** "With the adoption of all free meals for Hillsboro students, we have seen an increase in student participation, 33.5% and 22.9% for breakfast and lunch respectively (comparing October 2023 to October 2024 data). This is a win for everyone as the kitchen teams can focus more on making great food and serving our students rather than on a student/family's income and eligibility status, our families can trust and rely on us to feed their students resulting in lowered grocery bills and less items to remember to pack in students' backpacks in the morning, and our students have less barriers to food and nutrition with a more welcoming and inclusive cafeteria space and more focus on having a great day learning while in school."





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**Hillsboro School District, Cont'd:** If students were required to pay this year for a daily breakfast and lunch, it would cost \$1,247 for each elementary student and \$1,376 for each secondary student for the year. In other words, a family with 3 students in our district is saving \$3,741-\$4,128 this school year by offering all students a daily free breakfast and lunch, allowing them to use their resources in other ways to best support their family. For these reasons and many more, Hillsboro School District is taking every effort to maintain these services for our community and hopes to see the continued expansion of free school meals for all students in Oregon."

**Jefferson County 509J School District:** "In Jefferson County 509J, all students in all schools have access to free breakfast and free lunch. The communities our school district serves, from Madras to Metolius to Warm Springs to Gateway, are diverse and have many strengths that make our district such a wonderful place for students to grow and learn. However, high levels of poverty, marked by food insecurity for many families, is a bitter enemy of learning and growth for many of the children we serve. By providing healthy breakfast and lunch for all students free of charge, our students have access to the nutrition needed to meet their basic food needs, removing a significant learning barrier. We can remove the barrier of hunger for our children as they learn to read, be mathematicians and dream. I urge the legislature to finish this work on a statewide level that has benefitted families and students in 509J. "

**Jefferson School District:** "The implementation of free meals in Jefferson School District has yielded significant positive outcomes. By adopting the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) in January 2024, we have successfully eliminated the visible stigma previously associated with the free and reduced-price meal program, fostering a more equitable environment for all our students. This inclusive approach has directly translated to a nearly 50% increase in meal participation at our high school, and our lunch counts continue to rise, demonstrating our increased ability to nourish hungry students. Crucially, offering free school meals alleviates financial burdens on our families, particularly those facing food insecurity. Knowing their children receive nutritious meals at school at no cost provides invaluable peace of mind and reduces household stress."

**Klamath Falls City School District:** "School meals are essential for students in the Klamath Falls City School District because they provide the nutrition needed for academic success, focus, and overall well-being. We prepare fresh meals made from recipes developed by a team of chefs. For many students, school meals are their most consistent source of healthy food helping to reduce hunger and improve energy levels throughout the day. Ensuring access to nutritious meals supports equity in education, allowing every child the opportunity to learn and thrive."



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**Knappa School District:** “This is our first year of Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), a program which ensures all students at Knappa have access to nutritious meals at no cost, eliminating stigma, reducing food insecurity and meal debt. We have seen a significant increase in meal participation due to free meals for all. CEP ensures all students have reliable access to meals so they can stay engaged in the classroom and focus on their education.”

**Lake County School District:** “It’s important to highlight the essential role schools like Lakeview play in the lives of students. We are a rural, low-income area serving breakfast and lunch to students in grades K-12. For many of these students the school meals are their primary source of daily nutrition. Free school meals are not just a convenience; they’re a lifeline that helps ensure students come to class ready to learn and succeed.”

**Mapleton School District:** “Mapleton serves 150 preK through 12th grade students in a rural, low poverty area of Lane County. A recent United Way report lists Asset-Limited, Income Constrained, Employed families in Mapleton at 80%, which means most of our families struggle to make ends meet. We provide free breakfast and lunch, as well as a snack, for all students and have recently added supper to our afterschool programs. We are connecting our gardening and culinary programs to our cafeteria/nutrition programs, in order to ensure all students eat healthy, tasty meals daily. As a district with a four day school week, we also partner with a local organization to provide a weekend meal bag for many of our students. Mapleton is a food desert, our closest regularly available fresh produce is a 20 minute drive away. Providing free nutritious meals lessens the amount of sugary, fried food and energy drinks our students eat from the local market.”

**Milton-Freewater School District:** “Serving free meals to students in the Milton-Freewater School District, a district of 1,500 students, has had a profoundly positive impact on student well-being and school culture. Since implementing the program, the district has seen a noticeable increase in the number of students eating meals on campus, revealing that many had previously gone without food when a cost was attached. The most profound impact has been at the secondary grade levels, where we’ve found that teens were far less likely to let staff know they needed food. Our data shows a significant increase in meals served at these schools, highlighting the real and previously unmet need. Students are now more likely to stay on campus, enjoying meals and each other’s company without fear of standing out or feeling ashamed for not having food. By providing free meals to all, the district has created a more equitable environment where every child has access to the nutrition they need to learn and thrive, regardless of their family’s financial situation. This effort has been widely supported by the community, united in the belief that no child should go hungry. Additionally, staff are now able to focus on building positive relationships with students and families instead of serving as bill collectors, strengthening the school-to-home connection and fostering a more supportive atmosphere for everyone.”



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**Nestucca Valley School District:** “As a very small, rural, and isolated school district, we rely heavily on the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to provide meals at no cost to our students. Without CEP, managing the administrative burdens of Free and Reduced eligibility would be extremely difficult for our limited staff. Our students *need* these meals—they are a critical support system for the majority of families in our community, many of whom have no other access to essential services. Expanding access to no-cost school meals is not just good policy—it’s a necessary investment in equity and student well-being, so students may work to achieve their full potential.”

**North Clackamas School District:** “At North Clackamas School District, access to no-cost school meals is essential for eliminating barriers to learning and ensuring every child can focus on their education rather than hunger. By removing the stigma associated with no-cost meals and ensuring all students have access to nutritious food, we create more inclusive learning environments where every child has the opportunity to thrive. Universal meals also remove a financial stressor from families struggling to make ends meet. Since moving to no-cost meals for all students in North Clackamas School District this school year, 1,200 more students are eating school lunch and 380 more students are eating breakfast each day than the prior year when many students were charged for meals.”

**Ontario School District:** “In the Ontario School District, where so many of our families struggle with the harsh realities of poverty, free school meals are more than just food — they are a lifeline. For countless students, the breakfast and lunch they receive at school are the only balanced, nourishing meals they can count on. No child should have to try to learn while their stomach is empty or wonder where their next meal will come from. When we provide free meals, we’re not just feeding hungry kids — we’re showing them they matter, that their well-being is a priority, and that we believe they deserve every opportunity to learn, grow, and succeed. It’s a simple act with a powerful message: we care.”

**Portland Public Schools:** “For the 2024-25 school year, breakfast and lunch have been free for all Portland Public Schools students. At PPS, we believe access to nutritious meals is a crucial component of student success and well-being, and we have been thrilled to be able to take advantage of the federal expansion of CEP, and the additional SSA dollars, on behalf of our students. Free school meals ensure that students receive the nourishment they need to focus and thrive in their schools, regardless of their family’s socioeconomic status. Here is [a great news segment](#) about our district-wide CEP program.”

**Redmond School District:** “Our District and the charter school we sponsor have experienced nothing but positive impact from our ability to offer no-cost meals to all students this school year. We’ve seen both enrollment and attendance increases over the prior year. Participation in our meal programs have increased around 20%, which means more high school students stay





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**Redmond School District, Cont'd:** "...on campus during their lunch breaks. Both the administrative burden for the District and stigma for our families around qualifying for school meal benefits have been virtually eliminated, as has the financial impact of unpaid school meal debt."

**Reynolds School District:** "At Reynolds, we've seen firsthand how offering free meals to all students removes barriers, improves concentration, and supports overall well-being. Through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program, we can ensure that all students have access to nutritious meals at no cost, eliminating stigma and reducing food insecurity. When students have reliable access to meals, they can stay engaged in the classroom and focus on their education."

**Roseburg Public Schools:** "No child should be hungry at school. We ask students to show up ready to learn, work hard and play hard. But not all families can provide the nutritious food kids need to get through the day. In our district, around 40% of students lived in poverty as of the 2023-24 school year. At six of our eight elementary schools, nearly 95% of students now qualify for free or reduced-priced meals. That's up from just one school a year ago. Hunger pangs distract from learning. And being handed a cold sandwich while classmates receive a hot meal sends a clear, harmful message: You don't belong. If Oregon is serious about achievement, accountability and equity, universal access to school meals must be part of the solution — for every student, in every district."

**Salem-Keizer Public Schools:** "Free meals for students district-wide have allowed the barrier of family income to no longer dictate a student's ability to receive a healthy meal each day. No longer charging families for meals allows our students and their families to no longer worry about if or when a student might eat next. Some families rely on school meals to feed their children. In some instances, school is the only place students have a chance to eat. Removing the stigma of free or reduced-price meals and the process of applying for them significantly lowers the stress of families who need extra support. The ability to provide free meals to students has relieved the financial and mental strain on families and has relieved the strain on the district teams needing to process any free/reduced-price meal applications."

**Tigard-Tualatin School District:** "The Tigard-Tualatin School District, Oregon's ninth-largest school district, began offering a universal meals program (free lunch and breakfast for all) in fall 2024-25. TTSD's experience is that the change has vastly simplified the meals process for students, parents and staff. For example, staff don't have to build in time for kids to find their lunch cards, or help kids type in their lunch number. Parents report that the mental burden of preparing food has been relieved. Even when families could have received free meals previously, many didn't access them. Families experienced stigma, fear of sharing personal information and language barriers that prevented them from signing up for free school meals."



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**Tigard-Tualatin School District, Cont'd:** Most importantly, staff have observed positive results in students under the universal meals approach. The change has reduced anxieties around meals for kids. Previously staff reported that some students felt stigmatized around receiving free meals. Now, when all receive them, none of the students has that worry. Answers to frequently asked questions about the TTSD universal meals program and a short explanatory video can be found [here](#)."

**Umatilla School District:** "Fueling our learners is an essential part of education in Umatilla. Each day, we offer free breakfast and lunch as well as snacks and dinner for those who stay for the after-school program. We also have a Food Truck that delivers school meals to sites around town all summer long to support multiple feeding sites for students. Not only is nutrition key for healthy learners, it's an important piece of building connection and relationships. Our food tastings help bring student voice and choice to the menu and we've done a variety of new menu items based on student input and requests. We also host farmers from our area for the tastings and take students on field trips to farms so they can see where their food comes from and build relationships with a variety of people in the community. We appreciate the opportunity to provide meals for all students each day and consider our nutrition program an essential part of growing students as learners and healthy community members."

**Vale School District:** "In Malheur County, where roughly one in four children live in poverty and one in five households experience food insecurity, access to free school meals is not just helpful, it is essential. Currently, all Vale School District students have access to free breakfast and lunch each school day through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), removing financial barriers and ensuring every child starts the day ready to learn. In rural Eastern Oregon, where access to fresh, affordable food is limited, school meals often serve as the most reliable source of daily nutrition for many students. Access to free meals supports academic success, student well-being, and educational equity across our community. Sustaining and expanding these efforts is critical to meeting the diverse needs of students and families in the Vale School District."