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HUNGER-FREE SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY

HOW PARTNERS FOR A HUNGER-FREE
OREGON EXPANDED ACCESS TO FREE
SCHOOL MEALS IN OREGON



BY RILEY LINK

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This case study was written by Riley Link, an Emerson National Hunger Fellow placed at Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon. Riley worked with Hunger-Free Oregon from September 2019 to February 2020, on rulemaking and implementation of the Student Success Act. This report is based on her work experience and her interviews with 6 current and former Hunger-Free Oregon staff members: Fatima Jawaid, Matt Newell-Ching, Annie Kirshner, Chloe Eberhardt, Alison Killeen, and Marcella Miller.

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OVERVIEW

Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon successfully led an initiative to expand access to free school meals further than any state had – here’s what they learned in the process.

The school meal policies were ultimately passed in 2019 within the Student Success Act, a massive education package. The school meal funding options are the first of their kind in the country.

1. **Community Eligibility Provision Incentive Reimbursement Program:** To make it financially viable for more schools to offer universal free school meals
2. **Expanded Income Eligibility Group Reimbursement Program:** To provide free school meals to students from families up to 300% of the federal poverty line
3. **Breakfast After the Bell Requirement:** To serve free breakfast to all students in low-income areas

These are the major stages, activities, and lessons that Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon worked through in this initiative. These experiences may be shared by other organizations advocating for school meal policy change, or other anti-hunger work.

Stage 1: Listening to Families

Activities

- Hold listening circles with families and students who are accessing, and who need access to school meals.
- Collect surveys and data on the need for school meals and measure disparities in access to school meals among different demographics.

Lessons

- Explicitly agree as a staff to prioritize students who need access to school meals, especially students of color.
- Build an advisory board of impacted families to guide your initiative, listen to them, and compensate them well.
- Be proactive, not reactive. Strategize long-term, clarify deadlines and roles, and make room for the unexpected.

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Overview continued....

Stage 2: Crafting Legislation	
<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine policy priorities and the best policy tradeoffs for various potential budget scenarios. • Find a legislative champion. Work together to request, refine, and introduce draft bills. 	<p>Lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use data to model policy options and associated costs early. • Break down cost over multiple policies. Eliminate the reduced price copay first. • Frame school meals as an education issue. • Raise legislation prohibiting meal shaming to spark conversation about meal cost.
Stage 3: Passing Legislation	
<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn how to talk about school meals in a way that resonates. • Meet frequently with committee members and other legislators. • Promote media coverage and share advocacy tools with the public. 	<p>Lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build trust and personal relationships early. • Identify influential constituents of swing voters and ask them to advocate in specific ways.
Stage 4: Administrative Advocacy	
<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide feedback on iterative draft rules. • Mobilize public comment with clear talking points, sign-on letters, and easy-to-use tools. 	<p>Lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set details in rule to minimize financial and administrative uncertainty for school districts. • Create a community advisory council or other mechanism to prioritize feedback from families in rulemaking.
Stage 5: Technical Assistance	
<p>Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research the needs for assistance. • Compile existing resources and create state-specific supports. • Organize a communications campaign to raise awareness among impacted families. 	<p>Lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt resources and requests in recognition of different stakeholders strengths and positionality. • Use demographic data to prioritize one-on-one outreach to the most impacted populations.

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BACKGROUND

In school year 2020-2021, Oregon students will have the best access to free school meals in the country. This increase in access is due to the 2019 passage of the Student Success Act, a landmark education investment package that contains provisions impacting school meals. Although school meals have been shown to improve academic and health outcomes, previously, over a third of students in Oregon who experienced food insecurity didn't qualify for free or reduced price school meals.

Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon led the initiative for school meal access, from listening to the needs of families to crafting bill language. This is the organization's reflection on Oregon's journey towards universal free school meals. Despite different state circumstances, Hunger-Free Oregon hopes these lessons can be of service to other school meal advocates across the country.

At the outset of the Hunger-Free Schools Initiative Hunger-Free Oregon developed big goals:

- To eliminate disparate access to school nutrition for children living in poverty and for underserved communities of color
- To ensure state law requires school food practices, environment, and schedules that allow the greatest number of kids to eat school meals
- To engage more families at schools with high concentrations of poverty and high enrollment rates by children of color within the school food environment

Passing the Student Success Act moves Oregon towards, but does not fully achieve these goals. Due to racist, unjust actions in history and present there are still inequitable and inadequate outcomes in child nutrition. Hunger-Free Oregon will continue advocating for universal free school meals, stronger federal nutrition programs, and other policies to build equitable outcomes. This case study is not an account of Oregon's triumphs, but a tool to reflect, build accountability, and share learnings.

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ABOUT THE HUNGER-FREE SCHOOLS LEGISLATION

The Student Success Act contains three major provisions that affect school meals which are funded by \$41.6 million in annual state appropriations. Hunger-Free Oregon internally refers to these school meal provisions as the [Hunger-Free Schools legislation](#).

- 1. Community Eligibility Provision Incentive:** Through the creation of a state fund, Oregon will supplement the federal reimbursement for the Community Eligibility Provision so that the provision is financially viable for more qualifying schools. The Community Eligibility Provision is an option for schools and school districts in low-income areas to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications. This option increases meal access and decreases stigma and administrative burden. Hunger-Free Oregon estimates that $\frac{2}{3}$ of students may now be covered by the Community Eligibility Provision.
- 2. Expanded Income Guidelines:** Expanding income eligibility guidelines for school meal applications increases access to free school meals at schools that do not participate in Community Eligibility Provision. Students whose families earn between 185 and 300% of the federal poverty line may now qualify for meals served at no charge and reimbursed by the state. Previously, only families that earned up to 185% of the federal poverty line qualified; this meant [37% of food insecure students](#) were ineligible for school meals at no charge.
- 3. Breakfast After the Bell:** Schools with 70% or more students eligible for federal free or reduced price meals must make breakfast available to all students, at no charge, after the school day begins. Schools that already serve 70% of eligible students will be exempt. Schools are able to determine how they serve breakfast. For example, schools may serve breakfast: in the classroom, via grab and go carts, or by offering a second-chance breakfast. Grants of up to \$5,000 per school site are available for equipment costs related to Breakfast After the Bell implementation.

Although this legislation did not accomplish Hunger-Free Oregon's goal to offer free school meals to all students, over $\frac{2}{3}$ of Oregon students will now likely attend schools with universal free school meals and any low-income family should qualify for free school meals. Read more about the particular policy decisions Hunger-Free Oregon made to pass this legislation on page 16. For policy details see [pages 16-18](#) of the full text of the legislation and reference the [Fueling Students for Success website](#) for the proposed regulations.

TIMELINE

The Hunger-Free Schools Initiative consisted of five major phases for Hunger-Free Oregon: 1) Listening to Families, 2) Crafting Legislation, 3) Passing Legislation, 4) Administrative Advocacy, 5) Technical Assistance. This timeline provides an overview of the entire initiative and each phase is detailed in the following sections. Please note, some parts of phases occurred concurrently.

Building Towards School Meal Access

- 2006: Hunger-Free Oregon is established by the Oregon Hunger Task Force. Universal free school meals are a long-term goal in the state Plan to End Hunger.
- 2014: Oregon passes HB4090 to supplement the Summer Food Service Program with a state reimbursement
- 2015: Oregon passes HB5017 to eliminate the reduced-price copay for the National School Lunch Program
- 2015: Oregon passes HB2846 to allow schools to consider consuming breakfast during the school day part of “instructional time”
- 2017: Oregon passes HB3454 to prohibit shaming students for school meal debt

Pre - Hunger-Free Schools Initiative:

- Summer 2017: Hunger-Free Oregon plans the Hunger-Free Schools Initiative and launches fundraising efforts
- Jan. 2018: Hunger-Free Oregon receives a 2 year grant for the Hunger-Free Schools Initiative
- Jan. 2018: The Joint Committee on Student Success forms in the legislature to research and pass a large investment in education called the Student Success Act
- Feb. - Mar. 2018: Oregon Short Legislative Session: Hunger-Free Oregon introduces the concept of universal free school meals and a Breakfast After the Bell mandate to start building momentum

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Stage 1: Listening to Families

- Mar. - Oct. 2018: The Joint Committee on Student Success holds listening circles across Oregon on education, including school meals
- Apr. - Jul. 2018: The Hunger-Free Leadership Institute hosts a series of listening circles with parents about school meals
- Jul. 2018: The Oregon Hunger Task Force holds a listening session on school meals

Stage 2: Crafting Legislation:

- Summer 2018: Representative Doherty requests cost estimates and draft bills on school meal policy options
- Jun. 2018: Hunger-Free Oregon hosts a stakeholder meeting to determine policy strategy
- Nov. 2018: Representative Doherty introduces school meal bills in the Education Committee

Stage 3: Passing Legislation

- Nov. 2018: Democrats win a supermajority in the state Senate, raising the potential of passing tax increases
- Jan. - Jun. 2019: Oregon Long Legislative Session: School meal legislation works its way through committee and is passed
- Feb. 2019: The Education Committee holds an informational hearing on the school meals bills
- Feb. 2019: Oregon Hunger Task Force raises awareness about school meals for a Legislative Day
- Feb. - Apr. 2019: Hunger-Free Oregon sends over 1,000 postcards about the importance of school meals to legislators
- Apr. 2019: The Education Committee passes the Hunger-Free Schools bills out of committee after hearing testimony from advocates, education leaders, parents, and national partners
- Apr. 2019: The Joint Committee on Student Success releases a draft of the Student Success Act with provision on school meals
- May 2019: The legislature passes the Student Success Act passes and Governor Brown signs it into law

Stage 4: Administrative Advocacy

- Sep. 2019 - Oct. 2019: The Oregon Department of Education Child Nutrition Programs hosts stakeholder feedback sessions on draft rules
- Jan. 2020 - Mar. 2020: Official public comment period is open for the school meal provisions of the Student Success Act
- Feb. 2019: Oral comment period takes place at the first read of the proposed rules to the Oregon Board of Education
- Mar. 2020: The Oregon Board of Education adopts the revised proposed rules (Anticipated)

Stage 5: Technical Assistance

- Sep. 2019 - Dec. 2019: Hunger-Free Oregon researches Oregon school districts challenges to effectively implement the school meal provisions
- Jan. 2020 - Mar. 2020: Hunger-Free Oregon develops resources to provide assistance to affected schools (Anticipated)
- Apr. 2020 - Sep. 2020: Hunger-Free Oregon provides support to specific Oregon school districts (Anticipated)
- Jul. 2020: The Student Success Act takes effect and students begin the school year with increased access to school meals

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Hunger-Free Oregon staff created an internal Hunger-Free Schools team to manage project responsibilities including:

- **Child Hunger Prevention Manager:** Manages the initiative, liaises with school food service directors, provides technical policy analysis
- **Public Affairs Director:** Leads Hunger-Free Schools policy decisions and advocacy
- **Community Engagement Senior Manager:** Facilitates engagement of community members and assists with project management
- **Emerson Hunger Fellow:** Researches and designs technical assistance materials, with a focus on Breakfast After the Bell
- **Executive Director:** Contributes to project vision and strategy, leads fundraising efforts, and serves as the public spokesperson
- **Communications Coordinator:** Develops messaging, directs and executes communications strategy

Other stakeholders include:

- **Students and families** who need or are receiving free school meals. *This is your most important stakeholder.*
- **Members and entities of the state legislature**
 - **Representative Margaret Doherty**, Chair of the House Education Committee: Introduced and championed Hunger-Free Schools bills
 - **Representative Barbara Smith Warner**, House Democratic Leader, Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Student Success: Championed Hunger-Free Schools bills
 - **Education Committee:** Held hearings and refined details on the Hunger-Free Schools bills
 - **Joint Committee on Student Success:** Integrated the Hunger-Free Schools bills with the Student Success Act
- **Oregon Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs:** Encouraged meal program expansion, provided expertise and cost estimates on policy proposals, and led the rulemaking and implementation process

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- **Nutrition Service Directors:** Shared expert knowledge on school meal programs, advocated for universal school meals, and implemented school meal legislation
- **Partner Organizations:** Wrote letters of support, testified at hearings, and spread awareness
 - **Grassroots organizations** including, Familias en Accion and Growing Gardens, among others
 - **Nonprofits** including, Oregon Food Bank, the Oregon Dairy and Nutrition Council and Children First for Oregon's 2019 Children's Agenda, among others
 - **Unions** including, the Oregon Education Association and the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators, among others
 - **Government entities** including, the Oregon Hunger Task Force, and the Multnomah County Department of Human Services, among others
 - **National anti-hunger organizations** including, the Food Research & Action Center and Share Our Strength
 - **Financial supporters** including, individual donors and grants from Meyer Memorial Trust, The Collins Foundation, Share Our Strength, The Tusk Foundation and the Food Research & Action Center, among others

Lessons

- Consider your scope of work and establish clear expectations, boundaries, back-up plans, and flexible timelines.
- Dedicate time to long-term strategizing and be wary of false senses of urgency.
- Always prioritize families and students who need access to or are receiving free school meals.
- Build relationships with key stakeholders early. Recognize where your priorities overlap (and where they don't), then tailor your requests to their strengths.
- Mobilize nutrition services staff. They're already invested in every school district across the state and have the authority to make their case to state legislators.

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BUILDING TOWARDS SCHOOL MEAL ACCESS

Over the past few decades, Oregon had the worst rate of hunger in the country in multiple years, and on multiple measures, including child hunger. The state formed the Oregon Hunger Task Force in 1989 to recommend solutions and in 2006, the Task Force founded the nonprofit, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon. From the beginning, universal free school meals were an audacious, but important, long-term goal. Although these negative hunger rankings raised the issue, Oregon ended up passing the Student Success Act when it had average rates of hunger. Any hunger is too much and requires advocacy.

Hunger-Free Oregon learned the importance of school meal policy as staff provided outreach to schools to expand access to breakfast, lunch and out of school time meals. For example, despite programmatic efforts, it was clear that breakfast must be integrated with the school day to achieve high participation; awareness raising alone wasn't resulting in sustained or statewide improvements in breakfast participation. This policy initiative was part of Hunger-Free Oregon's organizational shift to integrate outreach for federal nutrition programs into state legislative advocacy. When the organization decided to pursue the Hunger-Free Schools Initiative in 2016, Hunger-Free Oregon had a decade of experience working on school meals to build on.

When Hunger-Free Oregon launched the Hunger-Free Schools Initiative, Hunger-Free Oregon had already been considering policy proposals internally, including:

- Mandating serving Breakfast After the Bell at high-poverty schools (included in the Student Success Act)
- Establishing a state fund to supplement the federal Community Eligibility Provision to encourage more schools to feed all students at no charge (included in the Student Success Act)
- Requiring schools to provide sufficient time for kids to eat lunch and to offer lunch after recess to maximize healthy eating and physical activity
- Improving school meal applications, the application process, and the availability of materials in diverse languages
- Requiring schools to solicit input from students, faculty, and parents to come up with nutritious, appealing, and culturally appropriate meals.
- Finding fixes for remote schools that have stopped serving school meals

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ESTABLISHING POLICY PRECEDENT

Over time, Hunger-Free Oregon advocated for various child nutrition policies. Many of these policies set the precedent for universal free school meals by:

- **Eliminating the federal reduced-price copay with supplemental state reimbursements.** This helped set the precedent that the state could supplement a federal reimbursement. Plus, it allowed Oregon to gradually assume the cost of school meal legislation. First, Hunger-Free Oregon eliminated the breakfast copay, then, used that success to eliminate the lunch copay. This decreased the cost of expanding income eligibility guidelines in the Student Success Act.
- **Advocating for all child nutrition programs, whenever possible.** This helped raise awareness that children lack access to adequate food due to cost.
 - Oregon had previously passed a small reimbursement to supplement federal summer meal reimbursements. This established precedent that the state could supplement a federal reimbursement.
 - Oregon had already started a mini-grant program to help fund expansion of after school and summer meal programs. This established precedent for state grant programs to offset costs not covered by federal funding.
- **Prohibiting shaming students for school meal debt.** In 2017, Oregon passed legislation to prohibit shaming students for school meal debt. This legislation shifted the financial burden from students onto school administrators and helped amplify the need for expanded access to free school meals.

LESSONS

- If needed, eliminate the reduced price copay for breakfast and lunch first. Breaking down the financial cost over multiple policies may make it more politically tenable.
- Try to pass legislation preventing lunch shaming simultaneously with legislation addressing school meal cost, to minimize the burden of unpaid meal debt. If you pass legislation preventing meal shaming first, use it to raise conversation on meal cost in subsequent legislative sessions.

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STAGE 1: LISTENING TO FAMILIES

In the summer of 2017, Hunger-Free Oregon decided to pursue a multi-year Hunger-Free Schools Initiative. Hunger-Free Oregon had been inspired by the forward movement on school meal access in Oregon and other states, and wanted to get closer to universal free school meals. After obtaining grant funding for the initiative, staff began to research community needs.

LESSONS

- Conduct further analysis on racial, geographic, and other demographic disparities in access to school meals in Oregon
- Assess current school nutrition practices and gather stakeholder input on proposed policy changes

LISTENING EVENTS

Hunger-Free Oregon held a series of events to listen to families with students who were accessing, or needed access to, free school meals. This consisted of:

- Around 12 listening circles led by the Hunger-Free Leadership Institute, a group of anti-hunger advocates with lived experience of food insecurity. These advocates designed the sessions to learn about people's experience with school meals and offered events in English and three other languages in the Portland metro area. Staff continued holding sessions in other geographical regions. This process yielded four main "buckets" of recommendations around school meals: access to meals, meal quality, service delivery, and community-decision making.
- The Hunger-Free Leadership also sought input from students. They held a listening circle with school-age students to ask about their opinions on school meals. They also sent out a survey to get feedback from a broader group of students.
- A listening session held by the Oregon Hunger Task Force in the summer of 2018. The Department of Education helped plan, presented at, and collected feedback from this larger, town-hall style event. As a result of this session, Task Force members adopted universal free school meals as a legislative priority. Task Force members are in strategic positions across the state and were helpful advocates in the legislative process.

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IMPROVING PATHWAYS FOR COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING

After listening to families, it was clear that they had serious concerns about school meals and wanted a seat at the decision-making table. Unfortunately, as Hunger-Free Oregon proceeded with the Hunger-Free Schools Initiative, families experiencing poverty were often left out of decision-making. For example, although families were most worried about meal quality, Hunger-Free Oregon decided as a staff to prioritize meal access before meal quality. Although there were good reasons for prioritizing meal access, families should have had more input in this decision.

At the time, staff at Hunger-Free Oregon were debating different ideas of what it meant to prioritize the leadership of people experiencing poverty. Although the organization valued listening to community members, doing so required more sacrifice of power, time, and money than expected. Some staff at the time decided to hold off on community engagement because doing so without adequate resources could create harm. Since this point, Hunger-Free Oregon had spent significant time building internal value alignment. Being clear on organizational values is also important outside of direct community engagement. For example, on school meals, many small decisions will come up that require prioritizing students who need access to meals at the expense of nutrition service departments.

Additionally, Hunger-Free Oregon is working on establishing authentic, long-term relationships to build mutual trust with community members and plans to create advisory boards of families experiencing poverty to guide future initiative work. The organization is also investing time and money in existing grassroots community organizing and is focused on hiring people with lived-experiences of fighting poverty and racism. Specifically, Hunger-Free Oregon is beginning an organizing project in one school district to work collaboratively with parents and schools on creating better pathways for decision-making regarding school meals.

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LESSONS

- Build internal alignment amongst staff on values that prioritize listening to and giving decision-making power to community voices. Be prepared for this to take time and money, and to sacrifice some power.
- Develop a plan for following up with people who share their experiences in listening sessions and ask them how they would like to be included in further processes.
- Don't be afraid to work slowly, but deliberately. The project will move forward when you give issues the attention they need along the way.
- Recognize your mistakes and hold yourself accountable to working toward solutions.

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STAGE 2: CRAFTING LEGISLATION

From the outset, Hunger-Free Oregon's goal was to provide Oregon students with as close to universal free school meals as possible. Staff anticipated that it would take multiple legislative sessions to pass significant legislation and began to build momentum by raising school meal policy ideas in the years prior to introducing legislation. Hunger-Free Oregon also wanted to include a requirement that certain schools serve free breakfast to all students after the start of the instructional day. Raising awareness about the importance of school meals took time. During this time, Hunger-Free Oregon established trust with legislators which allowed staff to actively shape the bill language and act as experts on school meal policy.

STAGE 2 GOALS

- Convene a broad coalition to develop state legislation priorities
- Craft legislation that would lead to the most comprehensive expansion of school meal access possible

INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDENT SUCCESS ACT

In early 2018, the Oregon legislature announced that they would pursue a large education package in the 2019 legislation session called the Student Success Act. Hunger-Free Oregon recognized that the Student Success Act was a critical opportunity for school meal funding and quickly started to make the case that school meal access should be priority. Including school meal provisions in this education package would make it easier to get support from some stakeholders who might be less enthusiastic about stand-alone school meal legislation.

The legislature formed the Joint Committee on Student Success to design the Student Success Act. The committee began by holding listening sessions across Oregon. At these listening sessions free universal school meals often organically emerged as a need, and Hunger-Free Oregon also encouraged local constituents to share the importance of school meal access.

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Staff also met with many members of the committee to share the importance of school meals and to stress that school meals would also be politically beneficial to an education package. Ultimately, in late 2018, the committee released a set of recommendations including that Oregon expand the number of schools serving universal free school meals as part of the Student Success Act.

WEIGHING POLICY OPTIONS

Early in the process, Hunger-Free Oregon began discussions with Representative Doherty, who was not only the Chair of the Education Committee, but also a public school teacher and a powerful school meals champion. Representative Doherty and Hunger-Free Oregon worked together to draft and introduce all the relevant Hunger-Free Schools bills.

If the school meal bills were included in the Student Success Act, it was unclear how much funding was available. Regardless, Hunger-Free Oregon knew that state legislation would have to build off existing federal nutrition programs. In the year prior, staff had considered multiple policy options, especially to supplement the federal Community Eligibility Provision. To identify policy options for varying budgets, Representative Doherty cost estimates from the Department of Education for:

- **Universal meals legislation** that supplements the Community Eligibility Provision and/or Provision 2 (another federal option to provide universal meals at a school site)
- **A hybrid policy** to expand on the Community Eligibility Provision and create a state reimbursement for expanding the income eligibility guidelines for meals at no charge
- **A Breakfast After the Bell mandate** for schools with different percentages of students eligible for federal free and reduced price meals

After receiving these cost estimates, Hunger-Free Oregon held a meeting of advocates and community groups to discuss the feasibility of various policy options. Legislators made it clear that the universal meals option would exceed the amount the Student Success Act could budget to school meals. Therefore, Representative Doherty requested bill language for a hybrid policy and a breakfast after the bell mandate which she introduced to the Education Committee in late 2018.

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The Child Nutrition Programs team at the Department of Education had worked to maximize school meal access and participation for years. Their staff was a helpful thought partner in determining between policy options and providing data. With this support, Hunger-Free Oregon modeled multiple policies variations to try to project what reimbursement rates and income eligibility guidelines would expand access to the most students, and at what financial cost. This entailed consulting with nutrition services directors to determine a minimum reimbursement rate that would make it financially viable for more schools to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision. Although reimbursing 100% of the cost would be ideal, Hunger-Free Oregon found that supplementing the Community Eligibility Provision reimbursement rate to 90% would allow the most schools to offer universal meals at the most reasonable cost request.

From the beginning, there was a long debate about how to best fund school meals for students not attending schools using the Community Eligibility Provision. The two prevailing options were: (1) create a smaller group of schools in lower-income areas to provide universal meals to all students (2) fund meals for students at any school up to a certain family income. Ultimately, Hunger-Free Oregon decided to pursue the second option to prioritize extending access to the most students experiencing food insecurity. It was then a matter of determining how high the income threshold for a participation could extend. Ultimately, the bills included a state reimbursement for families whose income exceeds the federal limit of 185% of the federal poverty line, but are still eligible for CHIP in Oregon, at 300% of the federal poverty line.

There was also a debate in the Joint Committee on Student Success about funding mechanisms. Some stakeholders wanted to fund these provisions through competitive grants, similar to the rest of the Student Success Act funding. This is politically popular because it has a predictable budget. However, Hunger-Free Oregon eventually got the committee to agree that school meal programs must be entitlement programs so, the budgets must fluctuate.

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LESSONS

- Frame school meals legislation as an education issue, not a social services priority. Education comprises a large amount of state budgets so there is often more funding flexibility.
- Find a legislative champion and be proactive about modeling different funding options when crafting bills together.
- Dedicate time to data modeling or partner with an organization with data expertise to model different policy interventions.
- Build in reserve funding. Projected costs are typically built on data from at least two years prior to implementation and funding should fluctuates with the need.

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STAGE 3: PASSING LEGISLATION

Hunger-Free Oregon worked concurrently on crafting the bill language and gathering stakeholder support. Around this time, multiple events made passing legislation more likely. First, in 2017, Oregon passed legislation prohibiting shaming students for school meal debt. This raised awareness about school meal cost and led nutrition services directors to amplify the need for universal free school meals. Second, in November 2018, Oregon Democrats won a supermajority, opening the possibility of raising revenue to fund an education package.

STAGE 3 GOALS

- Launch a campaign to build awareness about the impact of nutrition and school meals in achieving equitable academic success
- Mobilize stakeholders to advocate for passage of policy priorities

MODELS FOR BUILDING SUPPORT

Hunger-Free Oregon used a communications strategy that targeted requests for support to the strengths of different stakeholders, and relied heavily on interpersonal relationships. Prior to the Hunger-Free Schools Initiative, the organization had experimented with an anti-hunger coalition model. Although this ideally would have been a helpful tool for rallying support, it was difficult to communicate specific actions to the breadth of stakeholders involved. In retrospect, a smaller coalition focused on school meals may have been more agile.

Hunger-Free Oregon had powerful allies who helped advocate within the legislature. Representative Doherty chaired the Education Committee and introduced all the bills. Representative Barbara Smith Warner chaired the Joint Committee on Student Success and advocated for school meals to be included in the Student Success Act. Hunger-Free Oregon also had existing relationships with other legislators such as Representative Reardon, a member of the Oregon Hunger Task Force.

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Outside the legislature, staff established one on one relationships with other stakeholders including nutrition services directors, community-based organizations, members of the State Board of Education, and others. For the public, Hunger-Free Oregon published social media, blog posts, and short documents explaining policy positions. Hunger-Free Oregon also provided press releases to the media attracting coverage by many local outlets and even the New York Times.

At times it was difficult to educate people about the importance of universal free school meals. Many people have negative preconceptions about school meals, from their own childhood or media coverage. For example, some legislators reminisced about bringing home-cooked meals to school without recognizing this is not an option for many families. Some stakeholders could not understand the stigma that students often feel about receiving free meals, even when their eligibility status is kept confidential. For others, Hunger-Free Oregon often had to redirect attention from meal quality to meal access, the issues at hand.

One successful strategy involved having the public send postcards to legislators about why they supported universal free school meals. Hunger-Free Oregon ordered postcards with information about the school meal bills and worked with community partners to write and sign over a 1,000 postcards to legislators from their constituents.

PASSING LEGISLATION THROUGH COMMITTEE

Once the Hunger-Free Schools bills were introduced to the Education Committee, staff met with nearly every committee member to express support for the bills and address policy fixes. In February 2019, the Education Committee held an informational hearing on the school meal bills for which Hunger-Free Oregon arranged a panel of people to testify. At this point, there were two draft bills: one with a breakfast mandate and one pushing towards universal meals. However, the details of the bill on universal meals were still unclear.

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Hunger-Free Oregon continued to work on crafting bill details while simultaneously gathering support for the legislation. The same month, the Oregon Hunger Task Force held a lobbying day to express their support to various representatives. Ultimately, in early April 2019, the bills were passed out of the Education Committee.

Concurrently, Hunger-Free Oregon advocated for the school meal provisions from the Education Committee to be included in the Student Success Act. Staff testified repeatedly to the Joint Committee on Student Success that school meals should be a priority. As the policy priorities in the Student Success Act were winnowed down, school meals remained. Finally, the Student Success Act passed out of the committee in late April, with a placeholder for legislation regarding school meal access. After passing out of committee, the Joint Committee on Student Success integrated the Hunger-Free Schools bills from the Education Committee into the Student Success Act.

Once the legislation was out of committee and in the Student Success Act (a \$2 billion dollar investment in Oregon's Education System), school meals received less attention than the rest of the legislation. Hunger-Free Oregon advocated for the passage of the Student Success Act, with the leadership of many education advocates. Students across the state even staged a walk-out in support of the legislation. In May 2019, the Student Success Act passed and was signed into law.

LESSONS

- Meet frequently with members of relevant committees and build trust.
- Spend time understanding how specific swing voters and other critical stakeholders make decisions.
- Consider ordering postcards with information about policies, or other simple ways to demonstrate public support.
- Urge influential constituents to contact officials who are on the fence. Nutrition Service Directors are in a great role for this.
- Frame universal free school meals as a solution to school lunch debt.

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STAGE 4: ADMINISTRATIVE ADVOCACY

After the Student Success Act was passed, responsibility was passed to the Department of Education to operationalize the law and create regulations. Hunger-Free Oregon worked closely with the Child Nutrition Programs staff at the Department of Education during this rulemaking process.

STAGE 4 GOALS

- Advocate for families who face hunger to be centered by the Department of Education
- Speak up when inequitable rules are proposed and call out oppression and biases
- Ensure that the rules reflect legislative intent and reduce bureaucratic hurdles

THE RULEMAKING PROCESS

In fall 2019, the Department of Education held a set of public meetings to collect stakeholder feedback on the first drafts of the proposed regulations. The official public comment period opened in early 2020. Along with nutrition service directors, union representatives and other advocates, Hunger-Free Oregon provided detailed feedback on each successive draft of the rules. The organization specifically advocated for wordsmithing in the following areas:

- Requiring all schools not offering universal meals to participate in the new provision to expand income eligibility
- Ensuring that it is easy for families to apply under the expanded income guidelines
- Decreasing administrative burden and financial uncertainty for schools to participate in these new provisions
- Establishing reimbursement rates that incentivize schools to opt-in to the Community Eligibility Provision
- Ensuring compliance with Breakfast After the Bell expectations and offering non-competitive grants to schools to offset breakfast costs

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In rulemaking, Hunger-Free Oregon encouraged the Department of Education to set minimum reimbursement rates and other explicit guidelines so that schools confidently participate in the new provisions. However, some regulations were proposed without defining details, to allow flexibility in the case of inadequate funding. It may be helpful for other states to build in reserve funding or other mechanisms to establish confidence in state funding.

In addition to commenting on the proposed rules, Hunger-Free Oregon mobilized stakeholders to provide input. Coordinating often with community groups, nutrition services staff, and others was helpful for clarifying and building our response to the proposed rules. Frequent communication was especially important because rulemaking can be an exclusionary process, with high technical barriers to entry and little transparency. This was the first time in recent history that the Child Nutrition Programs team at the Department of Education underwent public rulemaking, and it was the first time Hunger-Free Oregon worked extensively on state rulemaking. This led to unclear rulemaking processes and timelines. Thankfully, Hunger-Free Oregon has a positive relationship with some Child Nutrition Programs staff at the Department of Education and were able to ask questions about the process.

Hunger-Free Oregon anticipates that the proposed rules will be adopted at the State Board of Education meeting in March 2020. (View the rules [here](#)).

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN RULEMAKING

Prior to the rulemaking process, Hunger-Free Oregon had advocated for the Department of Education to create an advisory council that would be inclusive of families who receive free school meals. Instead of creating this school meal advisory council, the Department of Education created a committee to advise rulemaking for the entire Student Success Act. This committee gave almost no attention to the proposed rules for school meals. Therefore, Hunger-Free Oregon considered inviting community representatives to participate in other ways but, struggled due to the high technical barriers to entry, lack of accommodations, and little organizational expertise with rulemaking. In future work on administrative advocacy Hunger-Free Oregon is seeking to create more accessible pathways for community engagement, by building authentic community relationships well in advance.

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LESSONS

- Build accessible pathways for community engagement based on authentic relationships. Advocate for and support a council for families most impacted by this legislation to provide input in rulemaking.
- Clarify the rulemaking timeline and feedback process quickly. This will allow you to be proactive, instead of reactive, to important deadlines and rule changes.
- Advocate for reserve funding early to minimize financial uncertainty in rulemaking.

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STAGE 5: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

These school meal provisions take effect for the start of the 2020-2021 school year. Hunger-Free Oregon is providing resources and school-specific support to Oregon schools that are adapting their meal programs to comply with and take advantage of the new provisions.

STAGE 5 GOALS

- Connect with Oregon schools to identify their needs for support in implementing the Hunger-Free Schools provisions
- Provide technical assistance to schools and districts where policy change is taking place
- Hold school districts and the Department of Education accountable for expanding meal access as much as possible

RESEARCHING THE NEED

In fall 2019, staff consulted with nutrition services directors from various school districts to identify areas to provide technical assistance. Hunger-Free Oregon based outreach on projections of which districts would be affected by the legislation, along with public demographic data to prioritize outreach to schools with high populations of students of color and low income students. After holding informational interviews with school districts and collecting feedback from other meetings of nutrition services directors, multiple priority areas emerged.

CREATING TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Hunger-Free Oregon developed tools for nutrition services directors, school administrators, and educators across Oregon which will be shared broadly by the spring of 2020, when schools will begin planning for the 2020-2021 school year.

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Although the Breakfast After the Bell requirement affects fewer schools than the other meal provisions, it causes the most stress because schools may have to change school meal procedures. Therefore, Hunger-Free Oregon focused many resources on Breakfast After the Bell implementation support. Hunger-Free Oregon launched a school breakfast website for the public with the Let's Do Breakfast, Oregon! coalition, published four videos featuring different breakfast service models, created an implementation guide for nutrition directors, and a breakfast toolkit for school administrators and educators.

As the 2020-2021 school year approaches, Hunger-Free Oregon will focus on encouraging families to participate in these school meal expansions. One major challenge will be informing families who earn between 185% and 300% of the federal poverty line about the eligibility change and encouraging them to apply for free school meals. It will also be important to build awareness about the Community Eligibility Provision and Breakfast After the Bell to increase student participation. Additionally, Hunger-Free Oregon will educate families so that they can act as advocates at their own schools and encourage school administrators to implement these programs well. Staff are working with the Department of Education to develop clear, non-technical, resonant language to communicate the changes.

PROVIDING TAILORED PROBLEM SOLVING

As the 2020 school year approaches, Hunger-Free Oregon plans to assist specific school districts with implementing the Hunger-Free Schools policies continuing to prioritize schools with high populations of students of color and high populations of low-income students. This tailored support will include close conversations with school staff to troubleshoot problems, providing school specific resources, and advocating with families and staff for course corrections.

LESSONS

- Use public data to prioritize technical assistance to schools with high populations of students of color and low income students.
- Create resources that schools can easily navigate and can be adapted to their specific needs.
- Provide tailored resources to school stakeholders, recognizing their power and positionality.

CONCLUSION

The Hunger-Free Schools Initiative began as an audacious, long-term goal to provide universal free school meals; Oregon is now one step closer to achieving this reality. Organizationally, this initiative was the largest concerted advocacy project that Hunger-Free Oregon has taken on and it accelerated the organization's transition towards centering more advocacy work.

Internally, working towards a bold, concrete goal gave staff energy, resonated with funders, and led to deep, positive organizational change. In that spirit, Hunger-Free Oregon is currently pursuing a Hunger-Free Campuses Initiative to address college student hunger.

Hunger-Free Oregon strongly encourages other states to provide universal school meals and use this experience to help inform their decisions. It is possible to dramatically expand school meal access, and with enough intentional work, it is possible to eradicate hunger.

To learn more about the Hunger-Free Schools work, please contact Fatima Jawaid, Program Manager, Child Hunger Prevention, at fatima@oregonhunger.org or 503.595.5501 x307.