Guide to Local Advocacy

How can you, a parent, caregiver, family member, or interested community member, support healthy meals in schools?

Child food insecurity in Oregon is rising. In 2022, 13% of Oregon’s children experienced food insecurity. The rate is 2-3x higher for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous children. Right now, the child poverty rate is skyrocketing as pandemic supports are cut. School meals have a huge impact on children and families and are a critical intervention.

School Meals for All is a coalition of students, school and community leaders, teachers and cafeteria workers, parents, food producers, and other advocates working to secure a values-aligned, universal school meal program for Oregon.

Some parents find it difficult or uncomfortable to talk with educators and administrators. They might not feel it’s their place. They may have had bad experiences in the past. And some parents just aren’t sure what to say — or when. While it’s not always easy, everyone in the community can have a voice and impact on school meals. We overwhelmingly find that school staff and leaders are pleased to hear from their community.

Steps you can take to be a local advocate for Healthy School Meals for All:

1. Get clear on what you want to support or advocate for! And why!
2. Do some quick research
3. Figure out who’s in charge
4. Find others who are interested in your issue.
5. Reach out to the decision maker you want to meet with and request a time to speak.
6. Keep it positive!
7. Stay engaged in the statewide campaign
Steps you can take to be a local advocate for Healthy School Meals for All:

1. **Get clear on what you want to support or advocate for! And why!**

Have some ideas about what you’d like to see. Maybe you have seen or heard of an innovative school meal practice in another district that you’d like to see available for your students or children. Are you...

- Advocating for increased access for students?
- Looking to encourage more fresh produce in a salad bar or snack option?
- Interested in more local sourcing at the schools?
- Wanting a garden at your school?
- Looking for nutrition and gardening education in the classroom or lunchroom?
- Interested in encouraging fresh breakfasts?
- Wanting to change some of the environmental aspects like having a longer lunch or having recess before lunch?
- Wanting better transparency of what is being served?
- Wanting to have more say in what types of meals are served

2. **Do some quick research**

If possible, visit your child or children at lunchtime and eat with them! So much can be learned by observing the process. If it is your first time visiting, call or email the school to confirm their process for visiting your child. They will be happy to help you.

Check out your district’s menus and local wellness policy.

- School menus can be found on district or school websites. Often, they are found under the heading of, “Nutrition Services.” For example, on the Sisters School District Website, you can find more information here:
● The Child Nutrition Act requires all schools participating in the National School Lunch Program or the School Breakfast Program to write and implement a local school wellness policy. This document covers everything from school food to nutrition education programs to physical activity recommendations. The USDA’s Local School Wellness Policy page details the background, requirements and evaluation of these policies. It's important to familiarize yourself with your district's Local Wellness Policy.

3. Figure out who's in charge

It depends on what you want! The coalition is developing a community-informed State Government proposal that supports every school across the state with additional resources and support. You can be a powerful advocate at the local level as well, making sure School Boards, Administrators, and School Nutrition Directors hear from community members.

Changing systems requires understanding where decisions get made and where authority lies. Decisions regarding school food are made at many levels of government and community, from federal to local. The Center for Ecoliteracy created this outline, which lays out the levels of authority and their responsibilities.

Federal Government

● Sets reimbursement and income level requirements for national breakfast and lunch programs
● Determines minimal nutrition requirements for federally supported meals
● Creates policies for commodity foods offered to schools
State Government (our coalition works here!)
- May supplement federal reimbursements
- Sets regulations for foods served in schools not participating in federal programs
- Administers food stamp nutrition education fund programs in schools
- Creates academic state-level standards and testing procedures
- Funds farm to school grant programs that support local food purchases and food/garden education

School Board
- Approves district operating budget
- Sets priorities for the superintendent
- Approves federally mandated wellness policies for local districts
- Proposes tax measures for approval by voters

District Superintendent/Administration
- Establishes expectations and priorities for food service, guided by federal requirements (break even, maintain surplus, and so on)
- Recommends budget, may propose allocating additional funds to supplement food service income
- Determines where savings achieved by food service, such as reduced trash-hauling fees, will be applied, guided by federal requirements
- Oversees design, construction, and maintenance of kitchen facilities and resources
- Secures additional resources, such as funding to staff garden and kitchen classes

Food Service Director
- Creates and manages food service budget, determining how funds will be allocated among food purchases, personnel, equipment, and so on
- Sets menus and documents adherence to required nutritional standards
- Procures and oversees preparation of food; locates and negotiates with farmers, distributors, and vendors
- Determines food service staff roles; oversees staff training
- “Markets” food service to students and families

Principal
- Sets the tone for campus regarding openness to change and spirit of cooperation
- Determines the level of support and encouragement for faculty and staff experimentation and innovation at the school site
- With teachers, creates class schedule (e.g., amount of time for lunch, order of lunch and recess)

Teachers and Staff (sometimes constrained by contracts)
- Choose whether and how to incorporate food and nutrition into classroom lessons
- Determine how food may be used outside of meals (for instance for treats and celebrations, or as reward and punishment), within local and state requirements
- Can model attitudes toward school food
- Usually maintain the most direct communication with parents

This chart is adapted from Michael K. Stone, Smart by Nature: Schooling for Sustainability (Watershed Media/University of California Press, 2009).

4. **Find others who are interested in your issue.**

Consider starting with: Local PTA’s or Farm to School Advocates
The Chef Ann Foundation has [resources for how to build support for a school meal policy](http://www.chefann.org).

5. **"Contact" your decision-maker by emailing, calling, or meeting in person.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact Script</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hello _____</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a (parent/caregiver/community member) in your school district who is interested in supporting healthy school meals for our students. I wanted to thank you for your work and initiative in providing healthy meals for students in our schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am working with other (parents/caregivers/community members) to find out how we can support improving school meals. If you’re available to talk or meet with us, we’d like to bring some ideas and resources to your attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please let us know when you may be available to discuss this further. We are available ____<em>.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you for considering.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. **Keep it positive!**

This point cannot be stressed enough. You are asking folks to make a change. For sustainable change, it is essential to have a trusting relationship.

7. **Stay engaged in the statewide campaign**

To get updates and opportunities to stay involved, sign up here. For additional information and support, contact Charlie Krouse (charlie@oregonhunger.org), Community Organizer at Partners for a Hunger Free Oregon

Adapted from materials developed by Rogue Valley Farm to School: rvfarm2school.org