

Oregon OKs expansion of free lunch program

By Sarah Zimmerman
Associated Press

SALEM (AP) — Oregon lawmakers have approved the largest statewide expansion of the federal free lunch program, ensuring all students living up to three times above the poverty line will have access to free meals.

It's the first time a state has offered to completely take on school meal costs, which can often run tens of thousands of dollars for individual school districts. The move is expected to provide hundreds of thousands of students with free breakfast and lunch.

One in seven Oregon households is "food insecure," according to the Oregon Center for Public Policy, meaning that families have trouble putting food on the table and often don't know where they'll get their next meal.

At least 174,000 children have limited access to food, more than the population of Oregon's second largest city, Eugene.

"Hungry kids don't think about education nearly as much as having something in their stomach," said Sen. Arnie Roblan, a Democrat from Coos Bay who helped craft the legislation.

At least 62% of students attend a school with high federal poverty rates. These schools can get federal assistance to provide free meals to all their students no matter their income levels under the 2011 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, a policy championed by former first lady Michelle Obama.

But even though these schools may qualify for assistance, not all of them take advantage of it because of low federal reimbursement rates. Instead, they only provide meals to those living about two times above the federal poverty level.

Around a third of food

insecure students in Oregon, however, live above that poverty threshold meaning they're ineligible for free meals, according to data from Feeding America.

Tim Sweeney, a superintendent in Oregon's impoverished South Coast, said that his district runs a deficit because it chooses to take on the cost of feeding all its students. Even with federal assistance, it costs around \$25,000 a year to provide free breakfast and lunches, money Sweeney said could have gone to textbooks.

"Poverty is a huge deal here and so many students rely on schools to provide them with food and a warm place for shelter," he said. "Food service may not be a winning game, but we know it means the world to these kids."

Oregon will now be the first in the nation to pick up these school districts' school lunch tabs, allowing 761 schools across the state to provide free lunch and breakfast to approximately 345,000 students.

In the 484 remaining schools that aren't high poverty and therefore don't qualify for the federal program, the state will cover the cost to feed kids that live up to three times above the poverty level, expanding the qualifying threshold to capture more hungry students.

The meals expansion is tucked away in tax package for schools, a sweeping \$1 billion annual investment explicitly dedicated to boosting student performance. The program, which will cost the state \$40 million a year, will be paid for through a new half a percent tax on business.

Gov. Kate Brown signed the school funding tax package, but it's likely to be referred to the voters to decide in 2020, thanks to Oregon's robust referendum process.

Girls LAX earns all-league recognition

By Rongi Yost
Correspondent

The Lady Outlaws lacrosse team had five of their players named to all-league teams including first-team all-leaguers Ellie Cook, Sydney Head, and Olivia Hougham.

Cook earned first-team recognition at attack. Ellie was a steady force for the Outlaws all season and led the team on attack with 35 goals. She also recorded 25 ground balls.

"Ellie was able to control the ball, and typically sat at the top of the 12, and directed the movement of the attacking end," said Coach Shelby Wilcox.

Head was named first-team all-league midfielder, and was rarely found on the sidelines. Sydney led the team with 67 draw controls and 30 caused turnovers. She also scored 25 goals for the Outlaws and tallied 45 ground balls.

"Sydney was the core of the Outlaws' midfield, if not the core of the team on the field," said Wilcox. "She's strong on all ends of the field

and her stamina gets her there. She's a strong attacker, a strong defender, and quick on her feet. We will miss having her in the center taking the draw for us."

Hougham earned first-team all-league defense. Olivia scored eight goals over the course of the season, and recorded 53 ground balls. She also had 21 draw controls, and 23 caused turnovers.

"Olivia often plays midfielder, but her defensive skills earned her first-team on defense," said Wilcox. "Though she might not be the biggest or the loudest on the field, her defensive presence is larger. She's incredibly fast, and it's impossible for an attacker to get around her. She's a great communicator as well, and is always ready to help her other defenders."

Mary Root and Pearl Gregg earned second-team all-league honors.

Root was named second-team all-league midfielder, and led the team with 62 ground balls. Mary also scored 31 goals, had eight assists, and tallied 29 caused turnovers.

"Mary carries a passion and intensity to her that brings drive and energy to the rest of her team," said Wilcox. "Being only a sophomore, Mary will continue to develop into a more and more talented lacrosse player. She dominates the midfield with her unmatched speed and her drive to succeed. I can't wait to see her develop in the next few years."

Gregg earned second-team attack, and scored 26 goals during the season. Pearl also had five assists, 30 ground balls, and 21 caused turnovers.

"Pearl quickly developed into one of the most talented and reliable players on the field," said Wilcox. "Her stick skills and scoring ability earned her all league this year. Pearl continues to blow me away with her ability to catch nearly any pass that comes near her. She sits further back on the attacking side and is so fast she is often open for the long pass to go to goal. She's a smart, talented player, and our team is lucky to have her."

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