

QuickPoint! - The Siren Song of Free Meals

By John A. Charles, Jr.

Thirty years ago, an iconic goal of liberal activists was to offer a free breakfast for all public-school students, regardless of family income.

In response, Congress authorized a three-year pilot program to test the effects of universal free meals for students.

In 2004 the USDA Economic Research Service published the results of what it called the “definitive data on the impact of universal-free breakfast participation.” The study compared gains in standardized test scores for reading and math for universal-free breakfast participants and nonparticipants and found “no significant differences.”

Nonetheless, today more than 90% of Oregon public schools provide both a free **breakfast and a free lunch** to all students. Activists hope to make it 100% of students in 2025.

If they succeed, it’s unlikely that they will stop there. The next demand will be universal free dinners as well. It doesn’t matter that subsidized meals are unnecessary for most families, or that state intervention undermines the role of parents.

From the standpoint of advocates, the primary goal is to make as many services as possible free to students, whether it’s food, computers, or birth control.

Parents aren’t considered to be important. In fact, they are treated as a nuisance in such matters as school discipline or gender pronouns.

Parents who care about their children should continue to feed them breakfast at home, and pack them a lunch. “Free” is not always a good price when it comes to developing moral character in children.

John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.

Cascade Policy Institute is a tax-exempt educational organization as defined under IRS code 501 (c)(3). Nothing appearing in this Cascade Commentary is to be construed as necessarily representing the views of Cascade or its donors. The views expressed herein are the author’s own.

October 23, 2024

Word Count: 244

Attention editors
and producers:

Cascade Commentaries are provided for reprint in newspapers and other publications, with credit given to author(s) and Cascade. Contact Cascade to arrange print or broadcast interviews on this commentary topic.

Please contact:

Cascade Policy Institute
4850 SW Scholls Ferry Rd.
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

Phone: (503) 242-0900
Fax: (503) 242-3822

www.cascadepolicy.org
info@cascadepolicy.org

4850 SW Scholls Ferry Road
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

t: 503.242.0900
f: 503.242.3822
info@cascadepolicy.org
www.cascadepolicy.org

