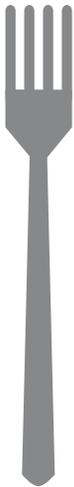


# UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEALS SERVE UP MANY BENEFITS

Since 2014, Hunger Free Vermont, along with the Vermont Agency of Education, has helped nearly 25% of Vermont public schools, serving over 16,000 students, take the money out of school meals. Now the results of multiple studies confirm that a universal school meals model is one specific, feasible intervention that improves multiple student, school, and community outcomes. These studies show that when all students receive breakfast and lunch at no charge, and when no student is singled out either for needing "free school lunch" or for having school meal debt, students and schools experience extraordinary benefits. Student learning improves. Student behavior and health improve. Relationships between school administrators and families improve. It's time for every student, in every Vermont public school, to have the same opportunity to thrive with Universal School Meals!



**83%**

of staff at participating schools agree that universal school meals

**MAKE STUDENTS MORE READY TO LEARN.**



**42%** of Vermont children in food-insecure households are not eligible for free school meals or 3Squares VT.

Universal School Meals improve performance in Math and English Language Arts by up to

**10 WEEKS OF LEARNING.**

**81%** 

of staff agree that with the universal school meals program,

**DIFFERENCES IN FAMILY INCOME ARE LESS VISIBLE.** And as a result 72% agree that it has produced an improved social climate.



## “Evidence-Based Strategies to End Childhood Food Insecurity & Hunger in Vermont” —The Urban Institute, 2019

In a 2019 study, The Urban Institute found that traditional school meal programs have a limited reach and do not serve many eligible and food insecure students. *Findings from the report include:*

- 1 in 4 eligible students does not participate in the school lunch program, and fewer than half receive free breakfast.
- adopting a universal school meals model would allow all students access to the same healthy meals and remove the application process, which could minimize stigma around accessing school meal programs.

## “Let Them Eat Lunch: The Impact of Universal Free Meals on Student Performance” —Center for Policy Research, 2019

This study of New York City middle schools shows that universal school meals is an effective tool to improve student learning and health outcomes. *Universal School meals:*

- improve performance in two subjects - math and (English Language Arts) - rather than one, while targeted educational interventions typically improve performance in only one subject"
- improve performance in math and English Language Arts by up to 10 weeks of learning.
- Has no negative effects on student weight outcomes, and decreases the probability of obesity for students who were not previously eligible for free school meals.

## “Universal Free School Meal Programs in Vermont Show Multi-Domain Benefits” —University of Vermont, 2020

For two years, researchers from the Department of Education at UVM conducted surveys and in-depth site visits with 240 staff at 57 Vermont public schools providing universal school meals. They found that a universal school meals model is one specific intervention that improves multiple school-wide and community outcomes.

*The surveys and interviews showed that:*

- Financial anxiety and overall stress declines. 98% of staff say that universal school meals have reduced financial stress on students and families. 52% of school nurses agree student stress levels have declined. 83% of staff say that universal school meals have reduced stress on administrators related to family financing.
- Universal school meals supports local agriculture. 64% of the schools were able to purchase more local food as a result of using a universal school meals model.

Information prepared by:



Faye Mack, (802) 231-1071  
fmack@hungerfreevt.org  
[hungerfreevt.org](http://hungerfreevt.org)

updated  
January 2020



“Students know they have meals at school and parents become aware of attendance because the meals are available. With students in school, teachers are able to teach. Students become better academically and also learn to adjust to social situations better.”  
—Vermont School Principal



Every student. Every meal. Every school.