

From: Richards, Alyson
Sent: Monday, July 02, 2012 1:17 PM
To: Spaulding, Jeb; Lofy, Bill; MacLean, Alex; Allen, Susan; London, Sarah
CC: Bartlett, Susan
Subject: FW: Providing free meals to low income students
Attachments: Free Lunch for Reduced Price Students.doc; Words of VT School Food Service Directors for H 234.doc

Hi all,

Wanted to give you more detail (attached and below) on what Susan Bartlett and I were talking about at our last senior staff meeting so you could all start mulling it over.

In summary, the proposal is to have the state pay \$0.40 for each reduced lunch student so they receive the "reduced lunch" benefit for free. We already do this exact model with breakfast for \$0.30 a student. The numbers are all in the attachments but to give you an idea:

- estimated population: 6,740 low-income Vermont students
- estimated cost: \$353,798 in state funds, which would leverage an additional \$267,563 in federal funds to be paid to schools.

There is already proposed legislation that seemed to have widespread support last year but did not get pushed through – Mitzi Johnson was very involved and has the background on this if needed.

The specific request is to add this directly into the Governor's budget. Thanks!

Aly

From: Dorigen Keeney [mailto:dkeeney@hungerfreevt.org]
Sent: Tuesday, May 22, 2012 2:19 PM
To: Richards, Alyson
Subject: Providing free meals to low income students

Dear Alyson,

I wanted to ask you who I should talk to about including the cost of free lunch for reduced price eligible students into the Governor's budget for next year. As you know VT currently pays the 30 cents for each reduced price student so they can get free breakfast. We would like to extend that to provide these same students with free lunch. There is particular urgency because, as we discussed, at the Policy Roundtable, the USDA is not allowing households that receive a zero 3SquaresVT benefit to continue to get free school meals. About 1,300 students will lose this benefit - we figure about 70% of them will end up being reduced price eligible - and many will go without lunch because their parents don't have the 40 cents.

There was a bill (H.234) introduced in the House that would have made this provision law but it languished in the House Ed Committee. Attached is the fact sheet we developed to support that bill. Please let me know what you suggest. Thank you for your help. Dorigen

Dorigen Keeney, MS, RD – Program Director

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The Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger is now Hunger Free Vermont.

H.234

A Proposal to Provide Free Lunch to All Low Income Students

Purpose: To expand free school lunch to all low-income children. Currently, based on family income, low-income students receive either free lunch or pay a reduced price of 40¢, with the federal government reimbursing schools for the remainder of the cost. Under the proposed legislation, the state would pay schools 40¢ for each reduced price lunch, allowing schools to provide free lunch for all low-income students.

Why this law is needed:

- Reduced-price eligible students **participate in lunch less** than students who receive free lunch.
- A similar law, allowing all reduced price eligible students to receive free school breakfast, was enacted in 2008 and has **increased breakfast participation by these low income students by 85%**, improving behavior and academic performance.
- Schools report that reduced price eligible children often do not have the \$.40 needed to pay for lunch, and that **some do not have food at home to bring a lunch and therefore go without eating all day.**
- A family of 4 that qualifies for reduced price meals makes between \$28,665 and \$40,793, well below the \$77,980 needed to meet their basic needs, according to the Joint Fiscal Office estimated for a rural family with 2 wage earners and 2 children (2009). Therefore, many **low-income families cannot afford the estimated \$9.00/month required to pay for lunch** at the reduced price.
- **Hunger in Vermont is on the rise with over 25,000 children living in families struggling to put food on the table.** Hunger is almost as frequent in households that are eligible for reduced price meals at school as those that receive free meals because they are not eligible for many income support benefits.
- School meal programs in Vermont are having **increasing difficulty** providing nutritious meals with the reimbursements they receive. This bill would support schools by increasing lunch participation and federal reimbursement, reducing meal costs, and reducing time spent on administration.
- **Students who participate in school meals programs have better behavior, health, and academic performance.**

What this bill would do for Vermont schools:

- Provide lunch to an estimated 6,740 low-income Vermont students every day who may not be able to afford lunch.
- Support school meal programs with \$353,798 and leverage an additional \$267,563 in federal funds to be paid to schools.

What this bill would do for Vermont farms:

- Expand the ability of school meal programs to purchase local Vermont foods through the additional commodity funds and reimbursements.

Costs and Revenue

Revenue to Vermont school meal programs:

State revenue to school meal programs would increase by \$353,798, providing the students' share of school lunch for the 6,740 reduced price eligible students. Additional federal revenue is estimated to be \$267,563 per year. Struggling school meal programs in Vermont would thus receive an additional \$621,361 each year.

(Basis of the estimation: If reduced price eligible students ate lunch at the same rate as free eligible students, because lunch is now free for them, then an additional 105,756 lunches would be served to reduced price students.

105,756 meals x [\$2.32 federal reimbursement per meal + \$.21 in federal commodities per meal] = \$267,563 per year. Adding this federal reimbursement to the state funds to pay for the students' share of reduced price meals would make a total of \$621,361 additional funds available to school meal programs.)

Cost to State of Vermont:

- **This proposal would cost \$311,495 per year at the current level of lunch participation by reduced price eligible students.**

(Calculation: Total number of reduced price lunches served in the 2009-10 school year = 778,737 lunches
Cost: 778,737 meals x \$.40 = \$311,495)

- **The proposal is expected to cost an estimated \$353,798 per year, because lunch participation would increase to that of free eligible students.**

(Basis of estimation: If the participation rate of reduced price students (currently 66%) increased to that of the free students (currently at 75%), the number of lunches would increase to 884,494 meals for the year.
Cost: 884,494 x \$.40 = \$353,798)

Background information on payments in the School Lunch Program

The federal government reimburses schools enrolled in school meal programs for the meals they provide based on a sliding scale depending on the income of the student's household. For students in households making less than 130% of poverty (\$28,665 for family of 4), the federal government reimburses schools \$2.72 for each lunch. For students in households making between 130-185% of poverty (\$28,665 and \$40,793 for family of 4), the student needs to pay 40¢ for lunch, and the federal government pays the remainder: \$2.32 for each lunch.

H. 234

A Proposal to Provide Free Lunch to All Low Income Students

Vermont School Food Service Directors in Their Own Words

“The most important thing about this bill is that more kids would be able to eat. That 40 cents is really hard for some parents, and for some of these kids, these are the only meals they get.”

-Earleen Bosley, Director of Food Service, Enosburg Falls ID Town School District

“Students in the Barre City schools who qualify for reduced meals have a 69% participation rate for reimbursed lunch. Student participation of those who receive free lunch is over 90%. A majority of students who qualify for the reduced meal miss the income eligibility for free lunches by just a few dollars. Many are from families with two or more students, who must bear the burden of providing money for their students’ lunches. There are also many who just go without lunch because they cannot afford the 40 cents daily. To many, 40 cents a day seems to be just ‘pocket change,’ but to a family with three students the \$6.00 a week or \$230.00 a year is an extreme challenge. This is what I observe in my school’s lunchrooms. Reduced students have the most difficult time to pay for meals, which becomes a revenue loss for the schools because we never recoup the unpaid lunch charges. This occurs more in the elementary school than high school. But what I see in the high school is the sharing of a meal between two and many times three students, and most if not all are reduced rate students. This is something not seen in a high school a few years ago but now has become a daily occurrence. Passing this bill would make a huge difference for all of these students and their families.”

-Steve Marinelli, Director of Food Service, Barre City Schools

“This bill is important because right now, parents are hesitant to fill out the application for free and reduced price lunch. They are worried that they don’t qualify, and confused about the rules. And I see this worry in the kids as well. Passing this bill would make it so much more likely that parents would sign their kids up, with no worry for them and no worry for the kids. Personally, especially for the elementary age group, I think that all students should eat for free. The government can spend money on lots of other projects, but these are our children and we need to feed them.”

-Lisa Sprague, Director of Food Service, Vergennes Union Elementary School District #44

“This bill is incredibly important for the children who are on reduced meals, especially if they have been getting free meals, and then their family does just a little bit better, and all of a sudden, they have to pay. I see this a lot at the high school, and it is a big jump for these families. It doesn’t seem like much, but it is, and the result is that students skip meals, because they have no money in their lunch accounts, or they might have some money in their account, but then they spend it on a cookie or chips instead of a meal. The bottom line is that kids who have to pay the reduced price don’t get the same nutrition as the kids who get free lunches. I think this is a cheap way to get nutrition into kids, and that’s the important thing.”

-Elizabeth Hammond, Director of Food Service, Montpelier Public Schools

“I feel this bill will feed more hungry kids in Vermont. We have many families that can not even afford \$2.00 per week for lunches. This bill will really help these families in need and feed kids that need to be fed. That is what we are here for.”

-Steve Davis, Director of Food Service, Colchester Schools

“It’s tough right now for everyone. We have more outstanding debt for school lunches from families and students this year than I’ve seen in my 20 years of working in school food service. We feed all the kids anyway, whether they have the 40 cents to pay the reduced rate or not, but if we were getting reimbursed by the state, we would be able to purchase more of the healthy options we are committed to serving, and especially more local foods.”

-Rick Hungerford, Director of Food Service, Union 32 School District, Washington Central SU

“I think that we would see more of the reduced students eating lunch if it was free. Although the \$2.00 for a week’s worth of lunches seems like a small amount of money, the fact is we still see that Students are having a hard time coming up with the \$2.00 every week. When the reduced students started to receive of breakfasts for free, we saw a big jump in the amount breakfasts being served.”

-Paul Morris C.E.C., Director of Food Service, Harwood Union Middle/High School and Moretown Elementary