

House Education  
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Thank you for the opportunity to join you today. My name is Marissa Parisi and I am the Executive Director of Hunger Free Vermont.

### Overview

- For more than 20 years our organization has worked with schools, towns, and local organizations throughout the state to provide summer and out-of-school time meals for children, particularly for those at risk of food insecurity.
- I've shared three handouts I will discuss to give you an overview of the problem of hunger among our children, especially at times when children are not in school.

### Summer Nutrition

- As an overview there are currently 36,000 children receiving free school meals in Vermont. However, less than 9,000 of these children have access to regular nutrition when school is out in the summer.
  - Hunger Free Vermont has helped create and sustain approximately 300 summer feeding sites for these children and saw extensive growth in this area in the last five years.
  - Vermont is currently ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in the country for our provision of summer meals for children. However, we are serving only 25% of the population that we know has need, so you can see that this ranking is somewhat "best of the worst" for the provision of these programs.
  - Summer meals and programs are really important for children because:
    - Unequal access to summer learning opportunities accounts for more than half the achievement gap faced by low-income students;
    - Kids at risk for obesity are more likely to gain weight in the summer;
    - Adding the cost of free meals at school back in to the family food budget puts a big strain on the household budget overall.
  - The good news is there is a federal Summer Food Service Program that reimburses schools and towns for meals at congregant programs that qualify. Hunger Free Vermont is here for everyone as a partner to assist in getting in to the program.
  - Most importantly, children want to participate in summer programs that include enrichment and learning activities which are not covered by the meal reimbursements. Many of these sites have to fundraise locally to provide activities and one of our biggest challenges with retaining summer meals sites is the lack of funding for activities and startup costs.

### Afterschool Nutrition

- Afterschool meals also play a critical role in student health and learning:
  - Schools with over 50% of their students eligible for free meals qualify for the Afterschool Meal Program (AMP).
  - AMP reimburses all meals at the highest National School Lunch Program reimbursement rate which is a great financial boost for the school meal program overall while providing critical nutrition for kids in afterschool programs.
  - During the hours of 3-6 pm are the prime risk taking hours for school-aged children.

- We've heard from providers around Vermont and the US that by adding food to an afterschool enrichment program you greatly increase the attendance rate at programs.

### **Conclusion**

- An increase in funding for afterschool and summer learning programs would be a significant win for Vermont and assist us in expanding nutrition programs across the state.
- Right now, the lack of affordable and accessible summer and afterschool programs means that many eligible Vermont schools are also not able to sustain summer and after school meal programs. In particular, less than half of Vermont schools eligible for the afterschool meal program are using it.
- I also want to emphasize that the Afterschool Meals Program and Summer Food Service Program are 100% funded with federal dollars so the more we invest as a state in programming, we will as a whole draw down more federal funding for nutrition.
- In addition, summer and afterschool programs and meals are perfect opportunities to expand farm to school projects like school gardens, local food purchasing, and local food education.

### **Questions?**

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