

Good evening and thank you for this opportunity. My name is Jaycie Puttlitz. I am the Wellness Coordinator for the Winooski School District. I am a resident of Colchester, and previously was the Wellness Coordinator for the Colchester School District where my children still attend school.

Thank you for funding programs to ensure Vermont children have access to healthy, locally produced foods, and can acquire the knowledge and skills needed to form lifelong, healthy eating habits. I am here to ask you to continue to invest in the healthy futures of young Vermonters by **restoring the \$50,000 cut** in the Governor's proposed budget and to **consider an increase** toward the needed funding of \$500,000 a year so Farm to School programs can reach 75% of Vermont schools by 2025.

When I started in Winooski, the district was just implementing a universal free meals program. Shortly after, we changed breakfast to be offered in the classroom, after the school bell. We are also able to provide dinners to students who participate in afterschool activities.

After initiating universal free meals in the Winooski schools, we immediately noticed a sharp decline in Health office visits due to hunger. As a trauma informed school, we are acutely aware of when our students come to school hungry. Hunger is one of the first needs we address when students are unable to focus on learning.

For many of our students, not having enough food to eat at home, or worrying about what they will eat when school is not in session, is a real fear. In fact, on Friday afternoon, I spent time gathering together leftover, uneaten food from the cafeteria and share baskets for two students to take home because they told an adult they were worried about having enough to eat during this vacation week. Guaranteed meals at school not only provides students with the nourishment they need, but also reduces the anxiety they feel, and helps them focus on learning.

Universal free meals also increases the quality and variety of the food. We are able to access more locally grown foods and offer more fresh vegetables and fruits. When children have access to these high quality foods, not only do they get better nutrition, but they also develop better eating habits which can lead to lifelong, healthier choices.

Farm to School grants help schools make important changes to their meal programs, like providing universal school meals or moving breakfast after the bell, so more Vermont schools can experience the positive impacts that we have felt in Winooski. More schools, and more kids, should have these opportunities. Please help by **increasing funding for Farm to School.**

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