

# PLEASE SUPPORT S.223 AND H.812—THE UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEALS BILL.



Every student. Every meal. Every school.

## The Universal School Meals bill would:

- Require all public schools in Vermont to make available school breakfast and lunch to all students at no charge to the individual student or family.
- Maximize federal reimbursement for meals at all schools.
- Require that costs of providing school meals that are not reimbursed through federal funds would be borne by school districts, and therefore ultimately borne by the Education Fund.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW AND WHAT WOULD CHANGE?

Currently, some schools offer Universal School Meals for one or both meals. Many of these schools have shifted the cost of their meal programs to their school's general fund, and thus it is covered by the Education Fund. Other schools keep their school meals program budgets separate and expect the meals program to "pay for itself." If a school does not offer Universal School Meals, then families not eligible for free school meals must pay for each of their children's meals. When families fall behind, the student can be singled out. At some schools they receive an "alternative meal" or no meal at all (because they might be too embarrassed to go through the line, knowing that they have debt). This situation creates inequity in our educational system, and it also means that students might be hungry, less ready to learn, and potentially more of a challenge for their peers and teachers. At the same time, the state of Vermont is leaving federal funds on the table because many schools have not been able to maximize student participation under the traditional meal program model.

## FUTURE VISION:

If enacted, the Universal School Meals bill would require all schools to transition over the next five years to providing Universal School Meals – both breakfast and lunch – so that every student would have access to two free meals every school day. The bill would also require all schools to draw down as much federal reimbursement as possible by participating in either the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) or Provision 2 (P2) programs – see the sidebar on this sheet for information on those two federal provisions. Schools would also be required to do all that they can to ensure the highest participation rates possible for school meals. High participation is good for students and for the state – when students eat, they are more ready to learn and be engaged, and when participation rates are high, more federal funds are available for reimbursements and schools are better able to afford local food. And, finally, after 5 years, all schools would include their meals program budget in the school's general fund, thus ensuring that Education Fund dollars are paying for the portion of this educational expense not covered by federal funds. The General Fund would no longer be partially covering this educational expense.



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# Universal School Meals Facts:



Universal school meals improves student performance in math and English Language Arts by up to **10 weeks of learning**.



**Up to 42% of Vermont children in food-insecure households are not eligible for free school meals or 3SquaresVT.** Universal school meals would reach them all with meals during each school day.



**72%** of staff at Vermont schools with universal school meal programs agree that universal school meals has produced **an improved social climate**.



**64%** of Vermont schools currently providing universal school meals have **increased their local food purchasing** as a result.



## TRANSITION PERIOD:

- The bill would allocate \$1million in one-time funding, available over the next five years, to provide grants for schools who might need equipment or training to make the transition to Universal School Meals. The grants may also help with the initial expenses of implementing a meal program or the process of getting into the CEP or Provision 2 programs.
- These grants would be administered through the Farm to School Grant Program, but the funding would be kept separate and used only for this purpose. After the five year transition period, any unused funds would revert to the regular Farm to School Grant Program.

## AGENCY OF EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS:

- The bill would require the Vermont Agency of Education (VAE), in collaboration with Hunger Free Vermont and the Vermont Association of School Business Officials, to update the Household Income Form right away and to review it annually to ensure it is up to date with best practices.
- The bill would also create one full-time, classified position specializing in the administration of school food programs in VAE. The position shall be transferred and converted from an existing vacant position in the Executive Branch of State government.\*
- The bill would allocate \$100,000 base funding for this position at VAE.\*

\*This provision not currently in the House bill

**The Community Eligibility Provision and Provision 2** are two paths created by the USDA for schools to offer universal school meals. Each provision establishes reimbursement rates for school meals based on the socioeconomic status of the school population. Enrolling in these provisions helps schools maximize their federal reimbursement while offering school meals at no charge to students. CEP may be used by schools with high numbers of low income students. Any school may use Provision 2.



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