

## USM Testimony

3/11

Thank you for the time, I'm Tristan Brown, Foodservice Manager for OSSU Elementary schools (Randolph, Brookfield & Braintree) I am asking the committee to pass S.100, and include both breakfast and lunch at no cost to all Vermont students, starting with the 2022-23 school year, and paid for from the education fund.

I have been part of the school food service for just over a year. I spent the end of last school year and the majority of the summer working for a New Hampshire branch of the Abbey Group and this school year I was lucky enough to start a job in my home town of Randolph Vermont.

I'm here representing the 327 kids me and my staff feed every day, I am here for their wellbeing, and their futures. I see these kids everyday, they are all unique kids and they're all excited to be coming into our cafe. They're hungry, they've been studying all morning, and they need to recharge, and we're happy to provide them with food to keep their body's healthy.

It's an ugly truth that not every kid has food to eat all the time at home, it's not hard for us to tell if one of our kids hasn't eaten, the signs are everywhere, they're slower, less productive, more irritable, and unfocused on schoolwork. With 2 guaranteed meals a day from every school 5 days a week we will be able to provide some food security and peace of mind for the children and the parent(s) who may not be able to provide it for themselves.

Universal school meals would allow our school to continue to provide healthy meals to our kids, no matter their family financial situation . A kid's right to food should not be dictated by their parents economic status, a child doesn't understand if/why they can afford a meal or not, all they see is either "i'm getting fed or I'm not."

These past two years of free school meals has helped start to change the culture in the cafeteria, more kids are eating school lunches, kids are comfortable asking for snacks or food to to-go, there is no questions about which child can and can't get a meal, there's no cash, there's no pin numbers, there's no barriers to food at all. Continuing universal school meals would mean we can continue to change the culture, reduce the stigma, and increase the popularity of school lunch.

As part of our job, The USDA regulates what we put on a plate, I'll the spare the little details, but the way it's written it assumes every kid gets a meal every day of the week, weekly goals for types of vegetables, and daily goals for fruit, protein and grains are all calculated to give a child a healthy balanced diet for the week. The glaring hole in the system without USM is that the meals will not be accessible to some kids every day.

Me and my staff are very excited to offer opportunities for our kids to experience new things and try new flavors. Last week a few 2nd graders tried *Cesar Dressing* for the first time, they now ask for a packet of it every day. We're about giving our kids the opportunity to develop a healthy relationship with food, and that starts with kids being exposed to new foods, learning what they do and don't like. A healthy relationship with food, developed from a young age will lead to healthy eating habits when they are older.

Here at Randolph we're very proud to offer a small but growing selection of local foods, we source all our ground beef from a local farmer, as well as some maple products, seasonal fruit, and fresh vegetables. As with every school we have plenty of canned and frozen food, but In an agricultural state like Vermont, highlighting locally grown food is important to our students. We want to keep the money in the state, and better yet in the community.

Going into the 2022 school year, most second graders, every first grader and every kindergartener will have never paid for a school meal before. Putting cash registers back in a cafeteria will be confusing and scary for the kids and it will create some awkward and tough financial situations for parents.

There is no dollar value on what a properly nourished kid is capable of, our kids here at Randolph are eager to learn, and need the resources to do their best. I hope for their sake that we can pass S.100 and continue to provide quality meals and quality education.

Thank you for the time, I'm Tristan Brown and I am asking the committee to pass S.100, and include both breakfast and lunch at no cost to all Vermont students, starting with the 2022-23 school year, and paid for from the education fund.