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**Summit Street School**  
**Essex Westford School District**  
**Town of Residence: Shelburne, VT**

Thank you for allowing me to speak today and thank you for the experience you bring to the Education Committee and your dedication to our Vermont School Children.

***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 22-23 school year, and paid for from the education fund.***

My name is Suzanne Gruending, and I have been an educator in Vermont for over 20 years. I am the Principal of Summit Street School, located in the Essex Westford School District. We are a school district with 10 schools and 4,000 students.

As we traveled the journey of the COVID 19 pandemic with our families in schools, many families reached out to secure additional resources for food security. Universal meals have provided us an opportunity to ensure that all students have access to the essential nutrition needed to learn and grow. Many of our Vermont families experience housing insecurity and students change school districts. Two meals a day should be provided out of the education fund so that all Vermont students can access high-quality meals, which is not dependent on what town you live in.

In the Essex Westford School District, our vision is *Growing hearts and minds for a better today and tomorrow; every day, every way, every one.*

*every day, every way, every one* means ALL. Feeding ALL students is one of the most essential activities that we do as a school every day. Guaranteed access to two high-quality meals a day is critical for Vermont School Children to grow and learn.

The ability to feed all students decreases stigma for students and increases student access to high-quality nutrition. We have seen our participation increase throughout the last two years

with Universal Meals. Money should not need to come into the school from families for this to happen. Now, more than ever we need to build communities and engage families in their children's learning. When families know that they owe the school money, it decreases engagement with the school and builds barriers with schools. Families often make difficult choices in order to send money to school for their children to eat, this increases stress within families and can bring families to a breaking point. Schools should not be in the business of exchanging money for basic needs. Two years of universal meals have shown us that removing this barrier, increases family engagement.

In the words of our English Language Learning Teacher

"Universal meals are a crucial part of school culture because it creates a sense of security, comfort, and belonging for *all* students, not only our multilingual and impoverished student populations. Universal feeding provides a stress-free opportunity to access a basic human need that may not be consistently available beyond school walls. Meeting this basic human need for all allows students to reach their full academic and social-emotional potential while in our care." from Kristina Natal.

Breakfast is not only an important meal to be ready for learning for the day, it is an essential piece of our social and emotional learning for kids. For 8 years Summit Street School has served breakfast in the classroom after the start of the school day. Starting after the school day begins, "Breakfast after the Bell", ensures that ALL students can participate. Universal meals provide rich choices for our students with the combined purchasing ability created by larger numbers in our child nutrition program.

Our educators in Vermont are highly skilled and efficient. Our 1,600 EWSD elementary school students have breakfast after the start of the school day in their classrooms. This is important. This provides authentic opportunities for all students to enjoy conversation, nourishing food, and social-emotional experiences in a group setting, followed by continuous education on composting and recycling, these are all things that make Vermont a better place.

While walking down the hall on a recent morning, a kindergartener ran ahead of me. In an attempt to slow their run, I engaged in conversation, and I said "what's the best part of your day?". I immediately got the reply "Breakfast!". I looked at the menu, it was "Homemade

Breakfast Bread", which sounds delicious and probably matched with excitement the day before of Berry Smoothies. Feeding all opens up these choices for our students, opens up our capacity to serve a variety of meals.

*While "Growing hearts and minds for a better today and tomorrow; every day, every way, every one" is our motto, Two Meals for Every Student, Every Day is my dream for Vermont School Children so that no student "learns" what hunger feels like at school.*

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