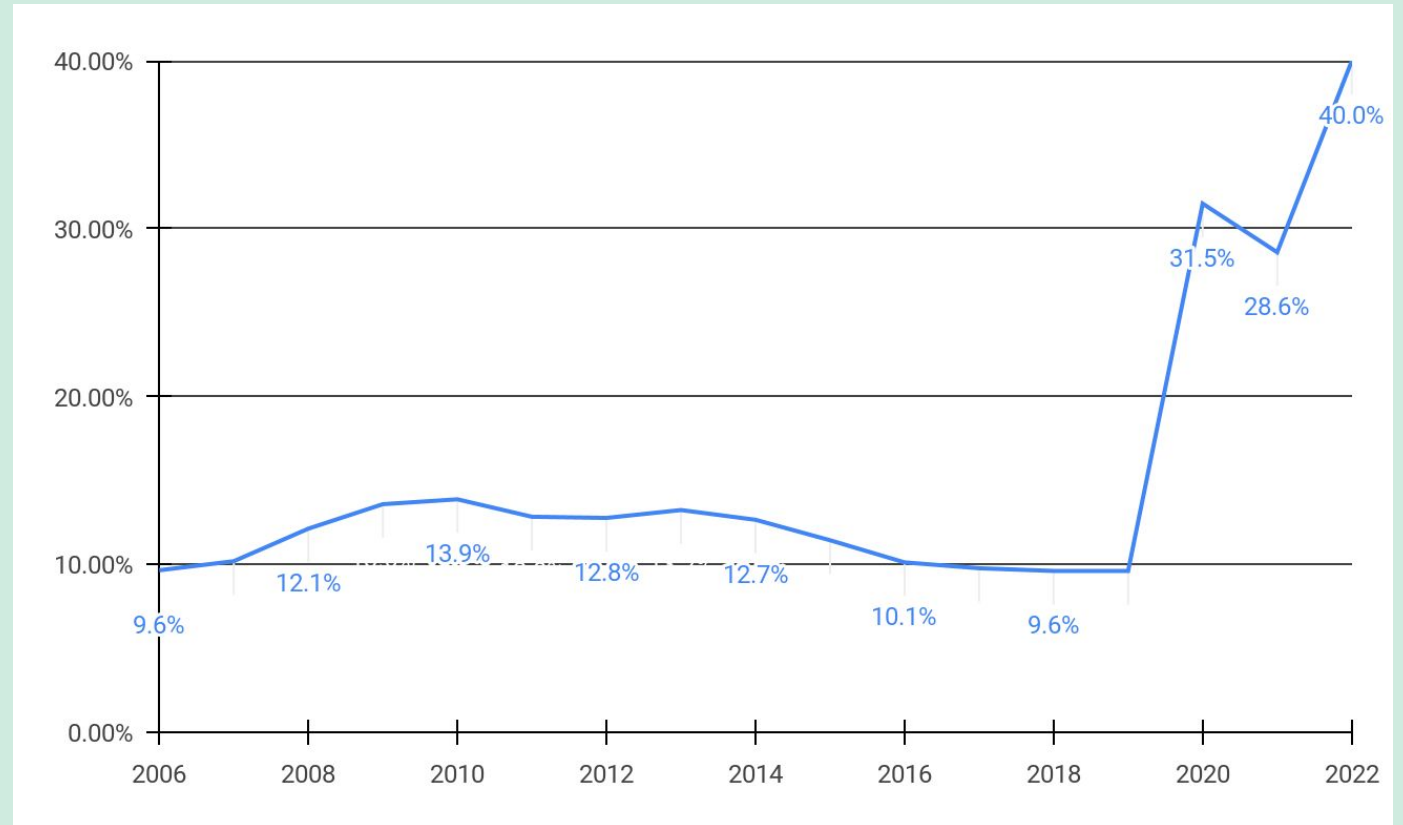


Every student. Every meal. Every school.

www.universalschoolmealsvt.org

Hunger before and throughout the pandemic

- Food insecurity had been declining steadily since spiking during the Great Recession and had been holding steady at 1 in 10 Vermonters for several years
- It took 10 years to return to pre-recession levels of hunger
- The Vermont Foodbank was serving 1 in 4 people annually
- 1 in 10 is an unacceptable level of hunger to return to as the status quo



Hunger inequities in Vermont

- **2 in 5** people in Vermont are currently experiencing food insecurity
- From March of 2020 through March of 2021, **individuals utilizing food assistance programs increased by 87%**
- In 2021, **27% of people in Vermont** faced food insecurity
- **Black, Indigenous, and people of color** were *10 times* more likely to face food insecurity than were white people
- **Families with children** were *5 times* more likely to face food insecurity than those without
- **Those who identify as women** were *7 times* more likely to be food insecure than were men

School meals in Vermont, pre-pandemic

- Some schools were already providing universal school breakfast and/or lunch (25% of public schools)
- In all schools without universal school meals shame, stigma, and cost kept students who need school meals from eating them – even students eligible for free meals
- Most school nutrition programs required an investment through the school budget – which was borne in the Education Fund. In 2020, federal waivers had been paying for these meals; for the ‘22– ‘23 school year, the cost of the meals was paid via categorical aid from the state Education Fund, continuing the program while keeping pressure off of local school budgets. H.165 makes that permanent.
- Without making Universal School Meals permanent, schools will be required to go back to the old way; putting back in place cash registers, administrative burdens, and stigmatizing systems

What is happening with School Meals?

- Public schools in Vermont have been serving Universal School Meals since March of 2020. From 2020 until June of 2022, this program was paid for through federal USDA waivers to school nutrition programs.
- In 2022, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed Act 151, The Universal School Meals Act. This Act extended USM for the 2022-23 school year, with the legislature expressing intent to finalize the permanent funding system this year.
- These meals have been a source of stability for schools, students, and families during a time of economic stress and uncertainty.
- Since 2021, Local food purchasing programs have allowed schools to buy and serve nutritious food despite rising food costs and supply chain disruptions; additionally, this provides economic benefits to farmers by stabilizing their local markets and selling more food locally!



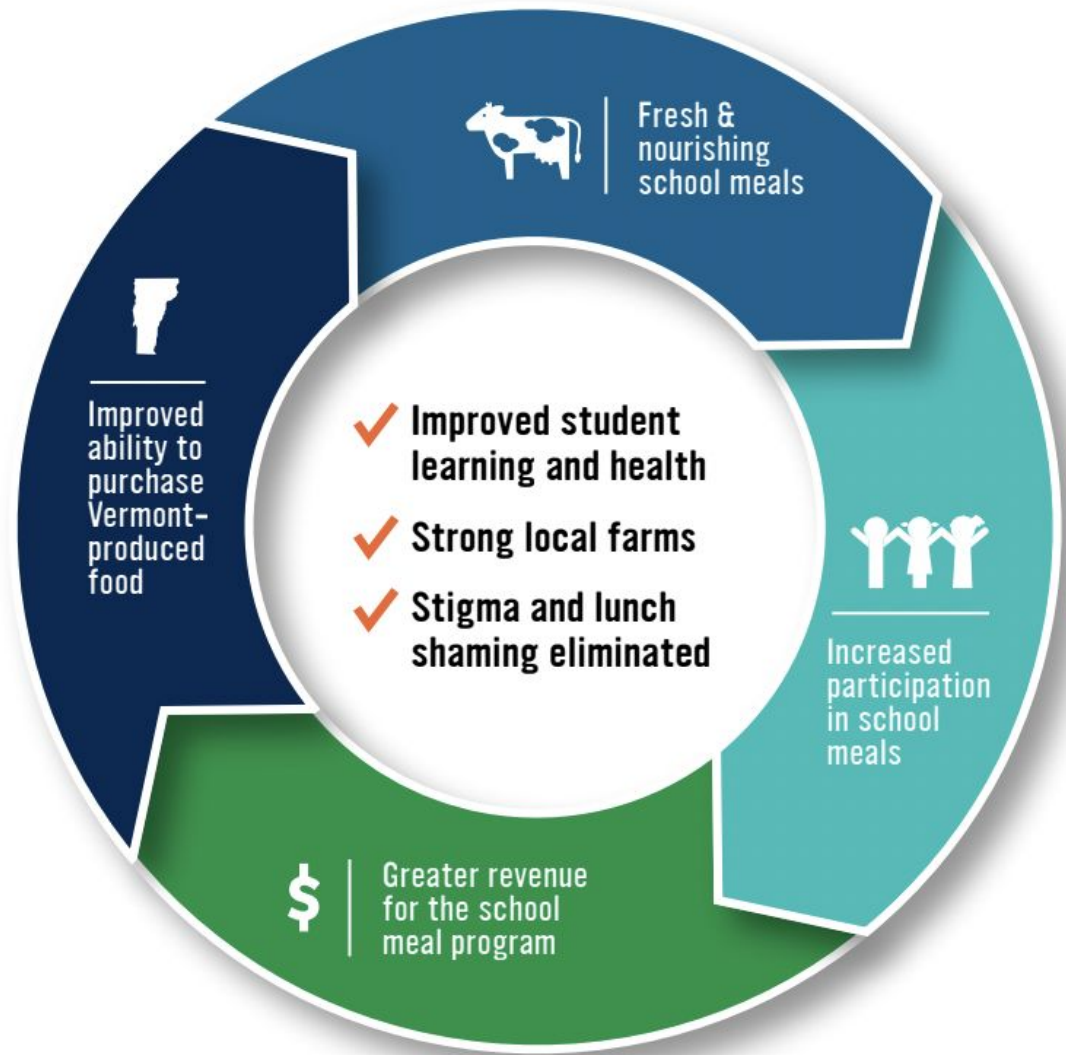
Universal school meals
for all students



Fully funded Farm to
School & Early Childhood
Grants program



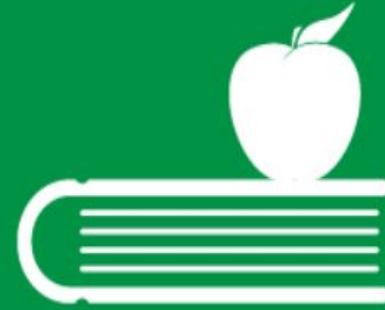
Local purchasing incentive
to support farmers &
school meal programs



The Benefits of USM

- Universal School Meals improves performance in math and English language arts by up to 10 weeks of learning (erases summer learning loss)
 - The greatest improvements were found among students who were not eligible for free or reduced-price school meals
- Food insecurity is strongly correlated to higher levels of anxiety and irritability among children.
 - As the severity of household food insecurity increases, so does the likelihood that children and adolescents will develop a mental health condition .

(In Vermont, a family of four could be over-income for free school meals and still make \$20,000 less than they need to cover their basic needs.)



Universal School Meals improve student performance in math and English Language Arts by up to **10 weeks of learning.**

90% of parents, teachers, and school nutrition professionals identified benefits to having universal school meals, including **better access to nutritious food, improved social climate, and better educational outcomes.**

96% of school nutrition professionals support permanent funding for Universal School Meals.

Prior to the pandemic, **64% of the VT schools providing Universal School Meals had increased their local food purchasing as a result**

H. 165 - Legislation to reach every student, every meal, every school day

- All public schools required to provide universal breakfast and lunch
- **Makes permanent Agency of Education policy** regarding public schools, independent school students, and non-profit childcare centers that are covered under a public school school food authority
- Schools would have to use one of the federal provisions, and implement best meal program practices (like breakfast after the bell) in order to ensure continued maximum federal reimbursements
- School meal program costs not covered by federal reimbursements or other funding sources (sale of adult meals, catering, etc.) would be included in school district general budgets, and ultimately borne by the State Education Fund, just like all other educational supports (textbooks, sports equipment, busses, school nurses)

What does this cost & what are the outcomes?

\$26-\$31 million per year in the Education Fund, with costs expected to ***FALL*** due to movement by the federal government

- Equity – improved learning, health, behavior, social climate available to all school-aged kids in Vermont
- Millions more in federal dollars flow into Vermont under Universal School Meals, with the federal government paying for more than half of the total cost
- Costs are expected to fall moving forward due to USDA rule changes regarding CEP eligibility AND the Medicaid Direct Certification rule change
- No more families in debt to their school meal programs (about \$1million a year pre-USM)
- \$29 million was allocated for SY22-23, and costs are currently running around \$27 million
- Participation in breakfast and lunch has risen an average of 17%

How's it going so far?

In the Senate:

- All Committees of jurisdiction have had introductory hearings on Universal School Meals broadly, with the bill expected to land in the Senate soon after crossover
- Senators have also heard from School Nutrition Professionals, and reviewed reports from the Agency of Education and Joint Fiscal Office

In the House:

- Representatives Brady, Brown, Cole, and Leavitt introduced H.165 earlier this session
- H.165 was amended and voted out of House Ag on a 9-2 bi-partisan vote, and is currently in the Ways & Means Committee
- The Ways & Means Committee is expected to vote this week, then head to Approps and the floor

How can you support universal school meals?

A few ideas:

- Visit universalschoolmealsvt.org and join the Campaign!
- **Talk to your legislators today about H.165, the Universal School Meals bill, and the importance of both breakfast and lunch**
- Tell your legislators why you care about universal school meals by signing a supporter card
- Sign your business or organization on to the Organizational Support letter
- Share your support on social media
- Write a letter to the editor for your local paper – we have templates!



Learn +

Act +

Support +

HUNGER FREE VERMONT



It's time for every student, in every Vermont public school, to have the same opportunity to thrive with universal school meals!



www.universalschoolmealsvt.org

Teddy Waszazak
Universal School Meals
Campaign Manager

twaszazak@hungerfreevt.org

781-219-8770



Vermont Foodbank

