



Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date: February 11th, 2016

Present: Lenore Beers (Coventry Village School), Martha Braithwaite (Building Bright Futures), Betty Bryars (North Country Union High School), Sean Bryars (Community Member), Dixie Burns (Vermont 2-1-1), Scott Choiniere (The Abbey Group), Rebecca Copans (The Permanent Fund), Shaun Donahue (Vermont Agency of Human Services), Bethany Dunbar (Center for an Agricultural Economy), Jane Edwards (Upper Kingdom Food Access), Maire Folan (Green Mountain Farm to School), Kelly Greaves (Vermont Department for Children and Families, Economic Services Division), Amy Lucas-Brasseur (North Country Supervisory Union), Becca Mitchell (Green Mountain Farm to School), Bob Partridge (Barton Avademy and Graded School), Julie Raboin (Vermont Department of Health), Jenny Rafuse (Vermont Department of Health), Laural Ruggles (Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital), Allison Shelp (North Country Junior High School), Kinsley Sicard (Vermont Department of Labor), Jessica Therrien (North Country Supervisory Union), Elizabeth Trail (*Barton Chronicle*), Justin Williams (The Abbey Group)

Co-Chairs: Colleen Moore de Ortiz (Vermont Department of Health) and Jeff Pierpont (Passumpsic Savings Bank)

Hunger Free Vermont staff: Faye Conte, Kathy Fleury, and Jenna Banning

<u>Welcome & Brief Introductions</u>	<u>Action Steps & Handouts:</u>
<p><i>Colleen Moore de Ortiz welcomed Jeff Pierpont as the new co-chair of the Hunger Council. Jeff welcomed everyone to the meeting, and asked for quick introductions and updates from attendees.</i></p> <p><i>Kathy Fleury (Hunger Free Vermont) - Kathy is the new Child Nutrition Manager at Hunger Free Vermont, and will be working with Jenna Banning to co-staff this Hunger Council. Kathy grew up in Vermont, and is excited to be working with this group.</i></p> <p><i>Allison Shelp (North Country Union Junior High School) - Allison is working on bringing Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to her school.</i></p> <p><i>Jane Edwards (Upper Kingdom Food Access) - The Upper Kingdom Food access group is working to bring Vermont Fresh to the Island Pond community. The group is also working with Dixie Burns of VT 2-1-1 to develop a printed food resource directory for distribution.</i></p> <p><i>Laural Ruggles (Northeastern Vermont Regional Hospital) - The Vermont Foodbank is holding a mobile food shelf at the hospital; the next drop off date is Thursday, February 17th.</i></p> <p><i>Betty Bryars (North Country Union High School) - This is Betty's first Hunger Council meeting. Betty has worked as a Nurse's Aid at North Country Union High School for 14 years and seen a lot of hunger in her teenage students.</i></p> <p><i>Rebecca Copans (The Permanent Fund) - This is Rebecca's first Hunger Council meeting. She is interested in helping to build a system to provide food.</i></p> <p><i>Martha Braithwaite (Building Bright Futures (BBF)) - This is Martha's first Hunger Council meeting. Martha is impressed with all of the service providers present at the meeting. Martha has worked with children and families in the Northeast Kingdom for years, and is currently the regional coordinator for BBF.</i></p>	

Meals. Schools in all three counties have USM, which means that 2,200 students have access to free meals.

Meal programs providing food outside of school time is also important. These programs are often available to a community when 50% or more of a school’s students qualify for free or reduced price meals, but once a school meets that threshold, all students are able to access the afterschool snack, meal, or summer meal site. These programs have pretty good reimbursement rates, so they are often a way to help food service operations make money and cover their budget.

Faye shared a chart showing what schools are eligible, or nearly eligible, to implement out-of-school meal programs, and offered Hunger Free Vermont’s assistance to schools who want to figure out the finances and logistics of these programs. In the Northeast Kingdom, there are 37 open summer meal sites (out of 150 total in Vermont) and 5 at-risk afterschool meal sites (out of 42 total in Vermont). These are good, but there’s also a lot of room for growth.

The Council heard from four panelists, who helped explain how school food services operate locally: Lenore Beers from Coventry Village School, Bob Partridge from Barton Academy, and Justin Williams and Scott Choiniere from The Abbey Group.

Lenore Beers (Coventry Village School) – Lenore is the food service director at Coventry Village School. She is a new employee of the Abbey Group; prior to working at Coventry, she ran the food service operations at Irasburg Village School for 4 years. At Irasburg, the school implemented Provision 2 for breakfast, which helped increase breakfast participation from 30 children to 100 children. The breakfasts were delivered to the classroom before the students arrived; Lenore then picked up and cleaned up afterwards, then did the administrative work. This worked well. The school implemented CEP the following year, as did all of Orleans Central Supervisory Union (except Glover and Lake Region, who don’t have high enough direct certification numbers). This worked great at Irasburg, and Lenore took this experience and knowledge to her role at Coventry with the Abbey Group. Coventry’s direct certification rate is pretty low, so the school is required to pay a little, but the School Board was very supportive of providing Universal School Meals (USM).

Lenore and Amy Brasseur explained how Coventry and Barton combined their direct certification numbers in order to help multiple schools use CEP (called bundling). Every other school in Orleans County SU uses their individual direct certification rate.

Bob Partridge (Barton Academy & Graded School) – Barton’s direct certification rate is between 70 – 80%, which means that they would have received fairly high levels of reimbursement if they had run CEP on their own. However, the school board and supervisory union decided to lump in Barton with the rest of the SU so that more children were able to get USM, even though this means that Barton’s food service receives less in reimbursements.

Lenore – With CEP in place, all of OCSU is seeing an increase in breakfast and lunch participation. Lenore emphasized the importance of serving breakfast in the classroom as a way to help increase participation – because it’s the norm that all kids eat food in the classroom, more children are able to access breakfast and feel comfortable eating.

The Council discussed the benefits and challenges of providing breakfast in classrooms and/or after the school days starts (aka Breakfast After the Bell).

Bob Partridge – Bob shared some of the administrative and paperwork changes that have taken place since implementing USM, and shared his happiness that the school no longer has to collect bills from children whose families hadn't paid. With Barton being looped into the rest of the SU in order for other schools to be eligible to run CEP, the food service operations are still in a deficit (although not as much as they had been before implementing USM), and since the School Board is supportive of this as a way to get meals to students, Barton is committed to running their food service with the rest of the SU.

Colleen Moore de Ortiz shared her appreciation for USM, which saves her family \$1200 annually.

Scott Choiniere (The Abbey Group) – Scott is the Vice President of Operations for The Abbey Group, a food service management company. Scott brought financial data for the schools The Abbey Group manages in the region, including Coventry Village School from last year and this year. Coventry implemented CEP this September, and the program has been ramping up since the beginning of the school year. Currently, the program is doing better and reimbursement rates are up – it's projected that the food service budget will break even next year, especially if they start running other programs such as afterschool meals (which have a high reimbursement rate).

Colleen invited the school nurses in attendance to share their experience with hunger and USM with their students.

Betty Bryars (North Country Union High School) – Betty is the School Nurse at the High School, and sees many teenagers who are hungry. Betty feels that the schools are responsible for their wellbeing, just as they're responsible for the students' education and future, and would love to see USM implemented. Currently, the nurses' office and staff members are donating money and food to help feed students, but it's not enough to cover the need.

The Council had an extended discussion about the social pressures around school meals and food, and some of the creative ways, including USM and family style meals, that schools can help students feel comfortable. *Betty Bryars* runs a "breakfast club" for students at her school, and sees a lot of students who refuse to eat enough because they don't feel comfortable in the cafeteria or don't want to sign up for "the poor kids" meals.

Justin Williams (The Abbey Group) – Justin is the Food Service Director for the Northeast Kingdom, and oversees 5 schools in the region, including 2 who have implemented CEP. Justin described how the scheduling of meals directly impacts participation rates, and gave examples of how the schools he works with try to make food available to take throughout the day. Justin also emphasized the importance of building relationships with students so that they feel comfortable.

The Council discussed the logistics of serving meals in a cafeteria, including the short meal times, and what foods are served at breakfast and lunch.

Scott Choiniere, Justin Williams, Faye Conte, and Amy Brasseur described afterschool meal programs, and the different ways they can be implemented and funded. With the AMPed up afterschool meal program, all students can take a meal or snack as long as the school is offering some form of enrichment programming. This differs from afterschool food being funded by CACFP – Hunger Free Vermont is available to work with schools or Council members interested in figuring out the eligibility requirements and "weird nuances" of these programs.

<p><i>Amy Brasseur shared some of the challenges of educating staff on the school meals programs, as well as the challenge of getting families to fill out the paperwork. The Council discussed different methods of increasing education and awareness for parents.</i></p> <p><i>Faye Conte shared an overview of a Universal School Meals and Farm to School bill currently being considered by the Vermont State Legislature. S.202 was proposed by Senator Sirotkin and supported by Senator Bobby Starr, who is from the Northeast Kingdom. The bill aims to help schools implement CEP as well as increase their local food procurement. Faye shared that Hunger Free Vermont may be coming to the Hunger Council later in the legislative session for support – the Hunger Councils have been great advocates for schools meals in the past, and Hunger Free Vermont is working on developing an advocacy model for the Councils as Councils will be statewide by the end of March 2016.</i></p>	<p>Action Contact the Child Nutrition Team at Hunger Free Vermont if interested in school, afterschool, or summer meal programs at childnutrition@hungerfreevt.org</p>
<p>Looking Ahead <i>Planning for the Hunger Council's next steps and goals for 2016</i></p> <p><i>Jeff Pierpont – Our next Hunger Council meeting is on April 22nd. Jeff asked the Council what they would be interested in learning more about in 2016. Topics proposed include: Farm to Preschool and early childhood nutrition; senior nutrition and hunger; the local food supply chain; and summer meals.</i></p>	
<p>Wrap Up & Final Announcements</p> <p><i>Kate Ash (Office of Senator Leahy) – Jenna shared two updates from Kate Ash, who was unable to attend the meeting:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Update on Child Nutrition Reauthorization: Last year, Senator Leahy introduced the bipartisan Farm to School Act of 2015 to expand eligibility and funding for the federal USDA Farm to School grant program, ahead of the anticipated Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR). On January 20, 2016 the Leahy-Cochran Farm to School Act of 2015 was unanimously approved by the Senate Agriculture Committee as part of the Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016. This is a great victory for the farm to school movement, and includes expansion of programming to afterschool and pre-school sites, and doubles mandatory federal funding to \$10M annually to support programs like those in Vermont. This bipartisan CNR also includes recommendations submitted by the Vermont Child Nutrition Reauthorization Coalition, including the maintenance of strong nutrition standards, as well as expanded eligibility for the Child Care and Adult Food Program (CACFP) and the Supplemental Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The bill may not now be considered by the full Senate, as well as the House before final passage and implementation of these included provisions. Please visit here to learn about the most recent updates to this process. ○ Senator Leahy Announces Expansion of Charitable Deductions of Food Donations: Back in December, Senator Leahy praised the inclusion of a provision aimed at fighting hunger by incentivizing donations of surplus food to local food shelves in the fiscal year 	



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<p>2016 spending package. In two previous congresses, Senator Leahy had been the leading advocate for the bipartisan Good Samaritan Hunger Relief Tax Incentive Extension Act, which expands and makes permanent incentives for farmers and businesses to donate excess food to nonprofit organizations like local food banks and pantries. Please visit here and feel free to contact Kate Ash with any questions.</p> <p><i>Faye Conte (Hunger Free Vermont)</i> – Families with children who receive the Vermont Earned Income Tax Credit VT EITC) are eligible to apply for 3SquaresVT benefits, even if their income is above the normal income limit for 3SquaresVT. If they apply and receive 3SquaresVT benefits, their children are also directly certified for free school meals. Many Vermonters don't know about this connect with VT EITC. Please help share informational materials (attached) during tax season.</p>	
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Next Meeting: Friday, April 22nd, from 10:00 – 12:00 at the Barton Memorial Hall