

Notes from July 7 Meeting of Task Force to End Student Hunger in Maine

(Deirdre Schneider and Jane Orbeton, OPLA)

(See separate document for information requests for August 11th.)

1. Present were: Sen. President Alfond, Rep. Kornfield, Sen. Millett, Rep. Reed, Rep. Black, Rep. Rankin, Rita Furlow, Michelle Lamm, Gail Lombardi for DOE, Therese Cahill-Low for DHHS, Ron Adams, Tiffany Krastis, John Woods, Clara Whitney for Kristen Miale, Holly Lusk. Absent were Sen. Langley and Tom Desjardin.

2. Senate President Alfond and Representative Kornfield welcomed task force members and introduced staff, Deirdre Schneider and Jane Orbeton from the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis.

3. Senate President Alfond announced the schedule for future meetings of the task force and invited feedback from members if they have problems with availability on scheduled days. All meetings will be held from 9:30am to 3:30pm, in the Cross Office Building in Augusta, except that the September meeting may be held in Bangor to enable the task force to visit a meals site and to hold a public hearing. The announced meeting dates (which are subject to change) are August 11, September 9, October 6 and December 8.

4. Gail Lombardi, representing the Department of Education, provided information to the task force on nutrition programs for students, including the school breakfast, school lunch, special milk, after school snack, and fresh fruit and vegetable programs. She provided information on the 8 full-time positions in DOE, one part-time position and one current vacancy. Task force members discussed the challenges to understanding childhood hunger posed by student meals data not including homeschooled students, foster children and other children who may be absent from school for some parts of the school year, and homeless students. With regard to the programs administered by DOE the task force heard the following information from task force members and a few members of the public:

School Breakfast Program

Maine has 680 schools offering school breakfast programs, serving breakfast for free, at reduced cost and at full cost. The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) compiles data on the states and rates Maine as having the 17th highest participation in the country, with 52% of students eligible for free or reduced-cost breakfast eating school breakfasts according to materials distributed by the Maine Hunger Initiative. Barriers to higher participation include stigma, fitting time in for breakfast into the school day, schools not placing a high priority on breakfast, students not having time to eat after school begins, operational costs that exceed USDA reimbursement, and difficulty in getting completed application forms returned to school. What are the best practices for running school breakfast programs and ways to increase the use of local foods?

School Lunch Program

Maine served school lunches to 46.7% of students eligible for free and reduced cost lunches in 2014, as figured by DOE. This amounts to 11 million free lunches, 1.6 million reduced cost lunches and 7.6 million full price lunches. The Maine Hunger Initiative figures school lunch participation at 67%. Lunch prices range from \$1.50 to \$2.75. The new meal pattern

increases fruits and vegetables, whole grains and skim and low-fat milk. Elementary school programs have the highest participation rates while high school programs offer the most menu options. Barriers include stigma, difficulty in getting completed application forms returned to school, students preferring socializing rather than eating. More locally sourced fresher foods require more preparation and staff time. What are the best practices for running school lunch programs and ways to increase the use of local foods?

Summer Meals Program

This summer Maine has 337 summer meals programs, operated by schools, colleges, summer camps, municipalities and non-profits approved by the IRS as 501(c)(3) entities. Partnering among schools and local businesses and organizations is critical to success. Positive partnerships have been forged with fire, police and public safety departments, CAP agencies, the Girl Scouts, Healthy Maine Partnerships, housing authorities and developers, and SNAP educators. The Maine Hunger Initiative figures Maine's participation rate at 18%. Outreach could be through parents' networking, ambassador families, posting on 211.org and the national Y hunger hotline. Mini grants from the Good Shepherd Food Bank this year have been used successfully for a variety of purposes, including literacy and science programming and transportation. Barriers to more programs and higher participation include stigma, fear of costs exceeding revenues, schools feeling that summer meals are not their responsibility, and the challenge of transportation during summer vacation. What are the best practices for running summer meals programs and ways to increase the use of local foods?

5. Therese Cahill-Low, representing the Department of Health and Human Services, provided information to the task force on CACFP nutrition programs and the 4 full-time positions in DHHS that administer the programs, coordinate with the child care subsidy program and provide outreach and public relations and all other needed services. With regard to this program the task force heard the following information from task force members and a few members of the public:

CACFP (Child and Adult Care Feeding Program)

The USDA provides \$16 million per year in funding for nutrition programs at child care and adult care settings that operate on a year-round basis. Maine DHHS also administers 31 programs that operate during the school year only for at-risk youth through age 12, migrant youth through age 15, and disabled youth through age 18, and over 400 after school programs. The Maine Hunger Initiative figures Maine's participation rate in at-risk after school programs, which offer enrichment activities and serve snack and dinner, at .8%. The CACFP reimbursement rate is higher than other programs, reimbursing \$2.93 for lunch or dinner. The average cost of lunch or dinner is \$3.50 to \$3.75. Could participation by sites increase with more public relations efforts and how can Maine coordinate or ease the transition from school year to summertime programs? What are the best practices for running CACFP, DHHS after-school and at-risk programs and ways to increase the use of local foods?

6. Task force members discussed the community eligibility provision (CEP), a process established by USDA to qualify a school system for the highest USDA reimbursement rates for a 4-year period based on certification of income eligibility of the families of the school's students. Coordination is needed for school systems among the USDA qualification requirements and the requirements for Title I and essential programs and services.