

# Notes from October 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Task Force to End Student Hunger in Maine

(Deirdre Schneider and Jane Orbeton, OPLA)

1. **Present were:** Sen. President Alfond, Rep. Kornfield, Rep. Reed, Rep. Black, Rep. Rankin, Sen. Millett, Rita Furlow, Michelle Lamm, Therese Cahill-Low for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Gail Lombardi for the Department of Education (DOE), Ron Adams, John Woods, Tiffany Krastins, and Clara Whitney for Kristin Miale. Absent were Sen. Langley, Tom Desjardin and Holly Lusk.
2. **Welcome:** 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. President Alfond and Rep. Kornfield thanked members of the public for attending and members of the two panels who spoke to the task force later in the day.
3. **Representatives of Maine's Congressional delegation:** Representatives of Maine's Congressional delegation participated in a panel discussion on issues related to student hunger and federal programs to address student hunger.
  - Rosemary Winslow, representing the office of Congressman Michael Michaud, spoke about hunger and poverty issues in her hometown of Waterville. She mentioned school and community initiatives to address student hunger and invited task force members to contact the Congressman's office for assistance at any time. Rosemary offered to contact the superintendent of schools in Waterville to inquire about the achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students.
  - Olivia Kurtz, representing the office of Senator Susan Collins, spoke about the Agricultural Act (the Farm Bill), reauthorization of SNAP, the community food program and the emergency food programs, and the school breakfast and lunch programs. She mentioned Senator Collins work on grant and loan programs to enable schools to buy equipment for food preparation and serving. She spoke of the need for flexibility in the school breakfast and lunch programs and in the summer food program. Olivia spoke of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers initiative and offered to assist in conversations between the USDA and the federal Department of Education.
  - Bethany Beausang, representing the office of Congresswoman Chellie Pingree, spoke of the pilot projects in some states to encourage the use of locally sourced foods in school meals programs, of cuts in SNAP benefits and of the reauthorization of the school breakfast and lunch program and the summer meal program in 2015. She spoke of the need for data on eligibility and participation, the need for increasing awareness of student hunger, the need for program flexibility, support for community eligibility, and the possibility of increasing SNAP benefits for families with school-aged children when school is on summer break.

Bethany spoke of food insecurity as a huge challenge for students and seniors.

- Marge Kilkelly, representing the office of Senator Angus King, spoke to the task force of four proposals that Senator King has made regarding school nutrition. The first is for a School Nutrition Advisory Committee to advise USDA on the development of USDA policies. The second is to delay implementation of the Competitive A La Carte options for schools until 2016 to allow the schools time to come into compliance with the new nutrition standards. The third is to allow schools to serve “no thank you” servings of some foods in order to reduce costs and waste. The fourth is to consider a geographic isolation bonus that will recognize the challenges faced by rural and small schools that are unable to purchase in volume. Marge spoke of price elasticity and the fact that a 5 cent increase in the cost of a school meal will bring about a loss of 1% of participation. Marge stated that the lunchroom is the largest classroom in the school.
4. President Alfond opened the meeting for comments from members of the public.
- Jim Hanna, of the Cumberland County Food Security Council, spoke of the importance of raising public awareness of the prevalence of hunger in our communities and of the importance of providing infrastructure to utilize assistance that is offered. He spoke of Maine’s alarming rise in food insecurity in the last 10 years - in Portland that being a 15% increase in eligibility for free and reduced cost school meals.
  - Bowen Depke, a Portland Rotarian, spoke of the Portland Rotary chapter adopting as a goal reduction in childhood hunger. He spoke of recent immigrant populations in Portland making up 95% of the children in summer meals programs. Bowen asked why the children and their families are hungry and whether society is setting them up to fail and what the possible disconnect could be.
  - Amy Gallant, representing the Maine Hunger Initiative, spoke in favor of an initiative to boost SNAP benefits in the summer for families with school-aged children for whom summer break means an end to the nutrition provided by their school programs.
  - Task Force members reviewed a proposal received by Jane through email from Tony Fairhead of Childhood Food Solutions. The proposal asked that the task force endorse a backpack program to provide 10 lunches to each eligible school student at the beginning of the December break in 2014 to provide needed food (and calories) when school meals are not available.
5. During the morning, task force members made a number of suggestions and asked and answered a number of questions. The information and suggestions included the following:
- Title 1 eligibility for schools includes a USDA requirement to file financial information. Even schools using the community eligibility program are required to file information.

- A member asked if use of the community eligibility program numbers alone is sufficient for state supplemental funding and suggested that Jackie Godbout in DOE might have this information.
  - A member asked how summer education programs could help to address the achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged student and to counteract summer slide.
  - A member spoke in support of the idea to lower the school eligibility level for summer/after school programs to 40%.
  - A member spoke in favor of a national pilot project backpack program.
  - A member spoke of the need for more flexibility in the CACFP program.
  - A member asked if any organizations were applying for the new USDA grant funding available for rural child poverty nutrition centers. Gail responded that she had sent the grant information along to the University of Maine and to the University of New England. She agreed to provide contact names to task force members. Michelle suggested Tom McLaughlin at UNE. The possibility of form a subcommittee to work on this grant opportunity was discussed.
  - Members discussed the application process for the CACFP program and the possibility of obtaining a waiver from USDA. Currently a CEP school cannot use the CEP designation to establish eligibility for CACFP. Therese spoke of age eligibility running to age 12 for CACFP in center based programs and to age 18 in at-risk programs. Ron spoke of the requirements for school-based programs that food be consumed on-site and of the flexibility of consuming offsite provided in CACFP programs. Therese suggested that USDA could waive the CACFP application process for schools offering after-school programs. Lynn Ludington, DHHS, provided information on “at-risk” clarifying that the label could be used to refer to a student that goes to a school with free/reduced rate of 50% or greater, which is considered an at-risk neighborhood.
  - A member asked the task force to make a recommendation of a program for 12 to 18 year-olds, with programming and meals provided.
6. The afternoon panel consisted of a school superintendent and representatives of 3 after school programs serving “at-risk populations” under CACFP.
- Brent Colbry, Superintendent of MSAD 54 in Skowhegan, spoke of the SAD’s 1-month of experience with CEP, under which all students are eligible for free breakfast and lunch and the only charges are for the a la carte food items. He mentioned that there is standing room only in the high school cafeteria and that participation has increased from last Spring 32% in

the school lunch program (from 60% to 81%) and 45% in the school breakfast program. He mentioned the outreach the SAD did to get the financial disclosure forms returned to the school for use in Title 1 eligibility. The return rate on the disclosure forms was 95%. He offered to provide to OPLA staff the letter that was sent to families. Brent also mentioned a full-price teacher's family that calculated that free school meals would save their family with 2 children perhaps \$1000 per year. He stated that most superintendents in the state are not well-versed in CEP, and there is fear about funding losses.

- Leonard LeGrand, represented the Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA of Waterville and the Alford Youth Center, 3 separate nonprofits that work together to provide programming at 3 sites and 35,000 meals per year, including a hot supper starting at 2:30pm. He mentioned families coming for family meals and educational programs and the 12 organic garden beds that will soon expand to a full greenhouse to be used for education, programming and a source of food. He mentioned the loss of funding that had been provided through DHHS for after-school care for 12 to 15 year-olds. Leonard and the other panelists stated that reporting requirements are too cumbersome, and that consolidation by USDA of their requirements for the CACFP and after-school programs would be helpful. It was suggested that DHHS and DOE could do outreach to community organizations by attending Healthy Maine Partnership meetings.
  - Paula Burke represented the Boys and Girls Club of Greater Gardiner which uses the CACFP at risk program to provide dinner and programming and after-school meals funding. Paula also mentioned Office of Juvenile Justice funding for some youth. She spoke of how staff at DOE and DHHS has been very helpful to her organization.
  - Raymond Estabrook and Patricia Estabrook presented information on their prevention program that runs as the Game Loft at the Mountain View School one day a week in Thorndike and 4 days a week in Belfast. Raymond stated that prevention is more cost effective than detention. They mentioned the use of non-electronic games and the kids' appreciation of the program as a place to find friends, food and safety. Patricia stated that the children have responded well to healthier food option. They mentioned the difficult issue of transportation and rural isolation, because a program is useless if people cannot get there. Raymond said for programs to be effective, a teen needs to attend at least two times/week. Raymond and Leonard suggested that there is a need for food to be able to go home with a child but that program rules forbid that.
7. Toward the end of the meeting task force members discussed issues and possible recommendations, referring at times to the working document on Student Hunger Report dated October 3. The discussion included the following:
- Rita suggested that DOE could work with Shared Services on opportunities for child care meals programs.

- Therese stated that CACFP funding does not require a child to be participating in a program.
- Therese asked that the task force recommend funding after-school programs for 12 to 18 year-olds that would include programming and meals.
- Therese asked that the report include actions to remove the barriers associated with the stigma of qualifying for free and reduced cost school meals.
- Sen. Millett suggested that the recommendation include a listening tour in the 5-year plan. President Alford mentioned that the current draft includes as a function of the Commission to End Student Hunger meeting four times a year in different locations in the state to hear updates, raise awareness, set deadline and guidelines and track dates.
- Suggestions were made for the writing of the report: that it includes a spreadsheet that identifies for each initiative the populations to be served, timeframes for undertaking the initiative, cost estimates and the agency or entity responsible for the initiative. Suggestions were also made that the report resemble in format the 2012 and 2013 Illinois reports and that it contain a frequently asked questions section.
- Task force members discussed specific sections of the working document and made suggestions on four possible broad goals and five possible broad actions. OPLA staff will incorporate the ideas that came from the discussion and will circulate a new working document.
- The next meeting date for the task force will be December 8, 2014.