

## Notes from September 9<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. Rankin, Sen. Langley, Sen. Millett, Rita Furlow, Michelle Lamm, Gail Lombardi for Department of Education (DOE), Therese Cahill-Low for Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Ron Adams, John Woods and Kristen Miale. Absent were Rep. Black, Tom Desjardins, Tiffany Krastins 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 the Bangor School Department and Bangor High School for hosting the task force meeting.

**3. Bangor Schools Panel Discussion:** Benjamin Sprague, Chair of the Bangor City Council, welcomed the task force to Bangor, spoke of Bangor's commitment to all of its residents, young and old, and stressed that nutrition programs for students and families are an investment in the future. Representatives of the Bangor School Department provided information to the task force as follows:

- Superintendent Betsy Webb presented information on the commitment of the Bangor School Department to every student, mentioning the adoption of common goals and a strategic plan and values, the importance of school and community partnerships, the Title 1 program, coordinated intervention for students needing assistance and the success that Bangor has achieved through decades of investment in its students. Dr. Webb stressed Bangor's dedication to academic excellence for all, professional excellence and quality instructional programs, its adoption of a personal learning plan for each student and of tracking student progress individually, and the importance of its partnerships with families and community partners. She spoke of the importance of local control to make programs work for all children.
- Noelle Scott, School Food Service Director, provided information on Bangor's school meal programs, after school programs, the summer meals program, the backpack program and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Grant. She spoke of the value of the Nutrikids computerized system, family eligibility determinations and of the monthly certification of eligibility provided by the DOE. Ms. Scott also spoke of the value of the partnerships that the Bangor School Department has with farms in its region to provide fresh fruits and vegetables. She mentioned that the Department will be exploring CEP in 2014-2015.
- Mr. Richard Fournier, Principal of the Fruit Street School, presented information on the elementary schools, in particular the Downeast School where he was formerly the principal and the Fruit Street School. He spoke of partnerships with families, the Bangor Housing Authority, the Bangor Boys and Girls Clubs, the Bangor Police Department and the Good Shepherd Food Bank. In addition, Mr. Fournier mentioned the value of the school department's work with the Penobscot Community Health Center, Community Dental Program and Community Partnerships for Protecting Children. He spoke of the benefits of working closely with city recreational programs and the importance of providing transportation for children.
- Mr. Robert MacDonald, Assistant Superintendent, presented information on Bangor's commitment to common values and on building understanding and fidelity to those values. He

mentioned partnerships, in addition to those mentioned by other school department personnel, with the Bangor Library and YMCA. Mr. MacDonald spoke of the SMART Grant that connects students to the University of Maine, School of Engineering, the STEM program and Title 1 programming.

- Lynn Silk, Principal of the Vine Street School, provided information on the commitment of the schools to each student, the value of personal learning plans for all students, the importance of placing all students new to a school on a watch list, and professional development that assists staff with their duties. She spoke of the Department's Response to Intervention Plan, which incorporates a tiered approach to determine if a student needs intervention and how that student's progress is tracked. She spoke of the importance of a champion in the life of each child and of the schools' importance in the child's achieving success at school and in the long term.
- Paul Butler, Principal of Bangor High School, returned the task force to the importance of curriculum, instruction and assessment. He spoke of the common message that the Bangor schools stress: the sense of purpose, pride in achievement and commitment to seeking out challenges.

#### **4. Public Comments:** The task force heard public comments from five people.

- Melissa Houston, Good Shepherd Food Bank, spoke of the backpack program that is funded with private donations and distributes food to 90 families from the Bangor School Department on Fridays during the school year, for a cost of \$225 per student per year. She supported the establishment of school food pantries, stressing that schools then become a resource for the family. Ms. Houston cautioned that 100% participation is a hard target to hit.
- John Moore, Bangor Savings Bank Community Reinvestment Activity officer, urged the task force to set goals that eliminate hunger for students during the school year, providing food to families in a manner that is convenient, affordable and via a normal channel for obtaining food. He stressed partnerships with the private sector. He suggested that using existing electronic payment systems, and having meals available in locations and venues the students use would be a flexible approach to ensure that students are being more readily connected to needed food.
- Jen, representing the Maine Hunger Initiative, spoke of her experience working during the summer with the SAD15 summer meals program which was funded with a grant from the Good Shepherd Food Bank. She spoke of the difficulty of starting the program and of the SAD's success in doubling the number of sites from year 1 to year 2 and of doubling the number of meals served.
- David Sturdevant spoke for the Bank of America. He encouraged the task force to reach out to businesses, to take advantage of the willingness of volunteers and to spread the word on student hunger and on the availability of assistance for families.
- Lois Kilby-Chesley spoke for the Maine Education Association. She spoke of the impact that a food insecure child has on the whole classroom and of the opportunities presented by pre-school and after school programs. Ms. Kilby-Chesley offered the assistance of the Maine Education Association in tackling the problem of student hunger and spoke of the value of the school as a community center.

**5. Community Leaders Panel Discussion:** Laura Pineo, Food Service Director for RSU54 in Skowhegan, Michael Myatt, Executive Director of the Bangor Housing Authority, and Shawn Yardley, a community leader, provided information to task force members from their perspectives as community leaders.

- Ms. Pineo, Food Service Director for RSU54, explained the recent decision of RSU54 to utilize the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) to provide to all students school breakfast and school lunch free of cost. To qualify for reimbursement under CEP at least 40 percent of a school's students must be directly certified. She said RSU54 qualifies because 44% of students are directly certified. Ms. Pineo stated that the school meals program is fully self-supporting and that the district is using a form, to collect family income eligibility data for the purposes of Title I program, other federal grant programs and the State of Maine essential programs and services funding formula. Ms. Pineo stated that in her district with 2900 students on the first day of school in the Fall of 2013, before the use of the Community Eligibility Provision, 59% of students eligible for free and reduced-cost lunch ate lunch, while on the first day of school in the Fall of 2014, with universal eligibility in place for free meals, 81% participated. Similarly with regard to school breakfast, participation of students eligible for free and reduced-cost meals saw a participation rate of 27%, which was an increase from the first day of school in the Fall of 2013. Ms. Pineo stated that the school district does not receive public funding in addition to its basic federal and state funding, that ala carte meal revenues and the occasional donation assist in meeting the costs of the program, and that while its food costs have risen with more students eating, the school food service has not increased its staff or other costs. In connection with this discussion task force members learned that school food service staff are not reimbursed as part of the State's essential programs and services funding formula – that local school districts must fund food service staff costs. Ms. Pineo mentioned the strong support of the Superintendent, school administrators and teachers and partnerships with a broad array of community organizations and businesses. She noted that school personnel have noted a drop in absenteeism since universal eligibility for school breakfast and lunch has come into effect. She stated that they will be using a general survey that looks at things such as trips to the nurse, absenteeism, and the need for discipline to see if there are difference since providing universal meals. She suggested that DOE overhaul its forms so that they better coordinate with nutrition forms. In addition Ms. Pineo noted that after school meal programs and summer meal programs operate within RSU54, although the “free meal” aspect of the Community Eligibility Provision do not apply to after school meal and summer meal programs.
- Michael Myatt, Executive Director of the Bangor Housing Authority, explained the after school meal programs and summer meal programs that the housing authority operates in areas of high food insecurity in Bangor. He stresses the importance of reliable transportation, the need for dedicated volunteers and partnerships with local organizations, and businesses and leadership from all levels within the school system. Mr. Myatt explained the critical nature of the backpack program in providing nutritious foods to the whole family. He mentioned the commitment of after school programs to providing help with homework, physical exercise, and activities that the students enjoy in a positive environment. Mr. Myatt discussed his regret that the housing authority program is serving only 10% of eligible students and the challenge of figuring out how to meet the needs of older students.
- Shawn Yardley, provided information from his perspective as a community leader. Mr. Yardley was formerly a DHHS child welfare worker, the Director of Health and Community Services for the City of Bangor and the Director of Community Services at Penobscot

Community Health Center. Speaking as an experienced community organizer, Mr. Yardley spoke of the lessons he learned from his own children and from the families with which he worked. He spoke of student hunger as a symptom and cautioned that addressing student hunger would help the individual student with just one challenge in the student's life.

**6. Information Discussion:** The task force reviewed 2 emails received from Anthony J. Fairhead, from Childhood Food Solutions, Cincinnati. Childhood Food Solutions is a nonprofit organization that provides food to students in a Cincinnati neighborhood that falls within one zip code that has been identified as being an area of high poverty. The organization concentrates its efforts on summer and winter break food insecurity. Childhood Food Solutions provides food, funded by donations that are dry, grain-based groceries. Mr. Fairhead's emails, which were received in the public drop box accessible through the task force website, urge the task force to commit to funding sacks of groceries that provide grain-based caloric support during the summer and winter breaks from school.

The DOE offered to obtain and share information on school meals finances in school districts, including from what sources school districts get funding when it is needed. The DOE provided and Gail Lombardi explained information on the school breakfast and school lunch average daily participation rates. Ms. Lombardi identified incorporating breakfast into the school day was an example of a best practice for school meals programs. Task force members expressed appreciation to DOE for the work involved in producing the data on participation rates that DOE made available prior to the meeting.

**7. Discussion of Options for Recommendations from the Task Force:** See attachment, Working Document, that includes a comparison of a discussion draft presented at the meeting and comments from task force members provided at the meeting. This document will be updated to include new comments received by September 29, 2014 and distributed before the October 6, 2014 meeting.

**8. Future Meetings:** Task force meetings will be held on Monday, October 6 and Monday, December 8, both meetings to be held in Room 209 of the Cross State Office Building in Augusta