

Vermont Universal School Meals Program

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Overview

Methods & Process

Benefits

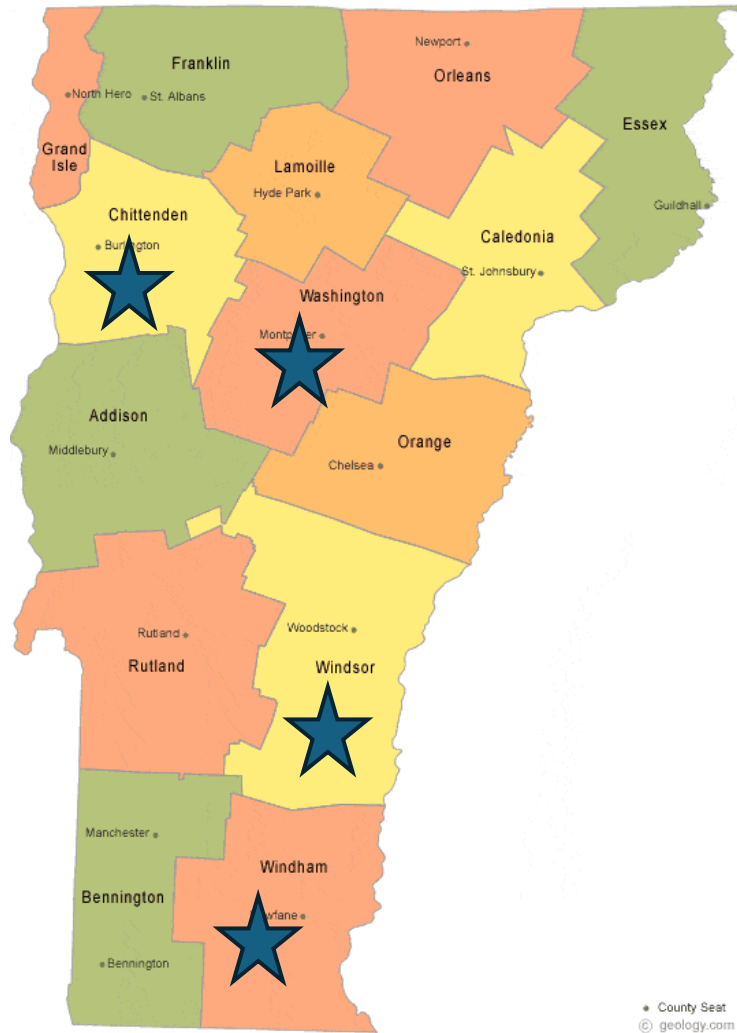
Post-USMP Scenarios

Costs

Program Comparison By State

Funding Sources by State

Methods



1. Literature review



2. Interviews with school nutrition coordinators

12 requests

6 interviews

4 counties

Key Findings from Interviews

Overwhelmingly in support of the program | 100% of interviewees expressed interest in continuing.

Participation has increased across school districts | *"Because of the increased participation in the program, it brings in more money, more federal funds, and that enables us to purchase different foods, expand the variety of food offered, and buy more local food."*

Many students fell into the "middle" | *"Kids who didn't qualify, like the majority of the beneficiaries of universal meals, are people in the middle. There's a big middle"*

Many of the benefits of the program are not well documented | *"Universal meals don't just feed kids—they change the atmosphere in schools. It's more positive, more inclusive, and better for everyone."*

School meals have strict nutrition guidelines that lead to inexpensive, healthy meals for kids
| *"I walk into a local convenience store and I see a chicken wrap that's \$8.99 now, and I'm serving local Boyden beef with french fries and all these sides, a 21-item salad bar, fruit and milk options... for \$4.25"*

Benefits for Students



**Reduces
cafeteria
stigma**



**Improved
lunch
participation**



**60.5% of
Vermont staff
said school
community
more
inclusive ^[3]**



“Universal meals don’t just feed kids—they change the atmosphere in schools. It’s more positive, more inclusive, and better for everyone.”

-School Nutrition Director

Benefits for Schools



Allows schools to purchase more local food

Vermont Local Foods Incentive
63.9% better able to purchase food ^[5]



Reduces school meal debt

Increased **4x** in Missouri after removal of program ^[10]
2024 federal medial unpaid school meal debt was **\$6,900** ^[11]

Applied to Vermont is **\$676,200**



Reduces burden on school staff and admin

82.8% reduced stress on admin related to family financing ^[3]

Benefits for Families



Reduces burden for low-income families

Income eligibility is **185%** of federal poverty line

Income threshold for single parent with two children is **\$34,645**

97.7% family financial stress reduced ^[7]

“

“Kids who didn't qualify, like the majority of the beneficiaries of universal meals, are people in the middle. There's a big middle.”

-School Nutrition Director

Post-USMP Scenarios

**\$100,000 Administrative cost
for each school
+
Unpaid meal costs
+
48,000 (60%) losing free lunch
under USMP**

"If the program were to end, we'd see a big drop in participation, less funding, and fewer resources for local food. It would have a domino effect." -School Nutrition Director

**Changes funding from a
categorical aid program to
district specific**

**Funds would be collected
more from homestead taxes**

**Increased burden for districts
with high per-pupil costs (with
potential for inequity)**

Scenario 1: Return to Pricing Program

Scenario 2: Fund at District Level



Costs – Current FY'24

“I don't mind paying to feed students and, you know, benefiting our community. That's money well spent.”
-School Nutrition Director



\$18.5 million from the
\$2.55 billion VT Education Fund
[3]



For FY 2023, the Legislature
added \$29,000,000 for Universal
School Meals



Vermont spends about \$23,466
per Vermont student, of which
\$346 is allotted to Universal
School Meals [6]

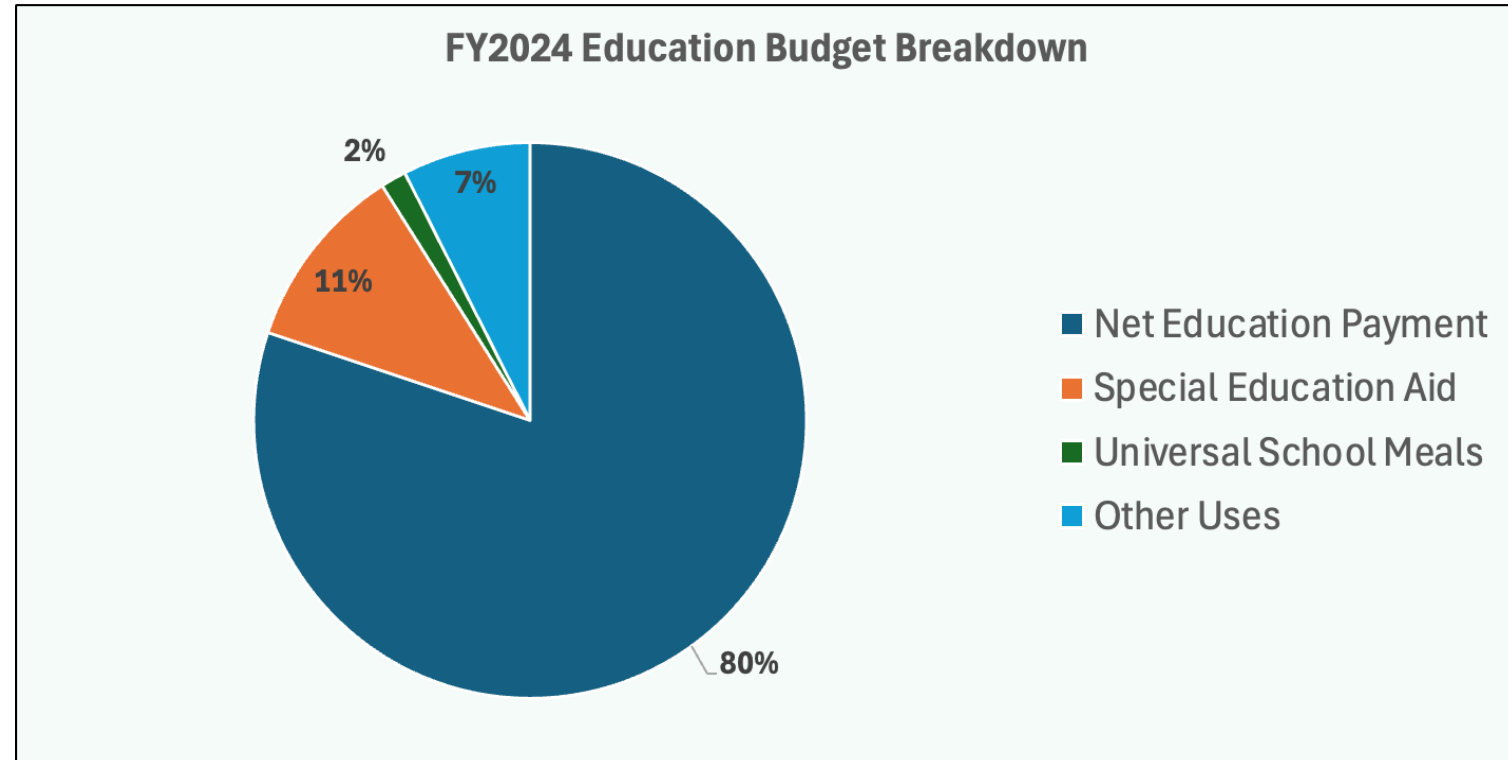
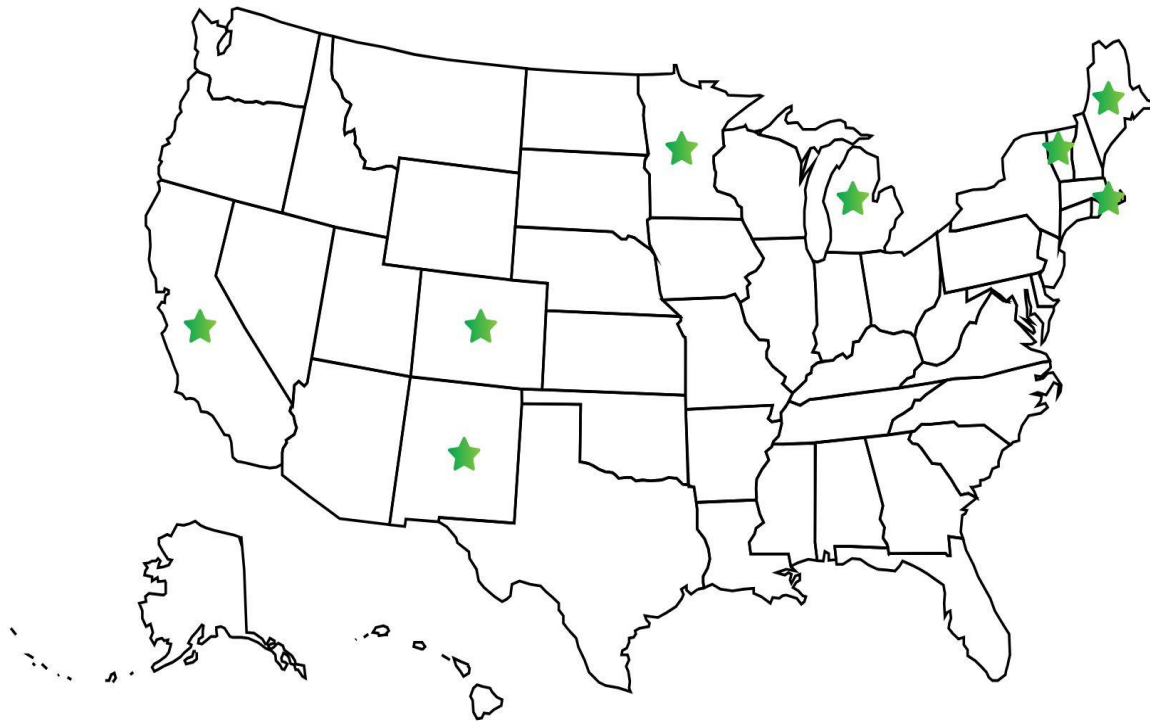


Fig.1: Data Compiled from the State of Vermont Agency of Education, 2024

Program Comparison By State



California | Universal School Meals

Colorado | Healthy School Meals for All

Maine | School Meals for All

Massachusetts | Universal Free School Meals

Michigan | School Meals Program

Minnesota | Free School Meals for Kids Program

New Mexico | Healthy Universal School Meals Program

Vermont | Universal School Meals Program

Funding Sources by State

State	Program and Legislation	Funding Mechanism	Funding Sources
California	Universal Meals Program	Proposition 98 General Fund	State Funds (income taxes) Local Property Taxes Other Local Taxes ^[14]
Colorado	Healthy School Meals for All	State Education Fund	Income Tax Increase on Earners Making over \$300k annually ^[17]
Maine	School Meals for All	General Purpose Aid	55% state funds, remainder through property taxes ^[13]
Massachusetts	Universal Free School Meals	4% Surtax (Millionaire’s Tax)	Portion of Revenue from Surtax (over half) ^[18]
Michigan	School Meals Program	School Aid Fund	Sales tax (largest source) Income tax State Education tax Other smaller sources of revenue ^[20]
Minnesota	Free School Meals for Kids	General Education Revenue	State aid payments from the state General fund budget Local funding from property tax system ^[15]
Vermont	Universal School Meals	General Education Fund	State funding (largely from property taxes) ^[6]
New Mexico	Healthy Universal School Meals	Public School Fund	General Tax Income Tax & Income Earnings Other taxes and revenue sources ^[16]

Fig.2: Data Compiled of Education Funding Sources for States that Offer Free School Meals

Conclusion



Literature and personal interviews show that USMP is beneficial to Vermont students, families, and schools.



With potential federal-level funding cuts affecting programs (SNAP benefits, the food bank funding, and the USDA's Local Food for Schools), it is important to find more diversified and sustainable funding sources to ensure the longevity of the program.



While this is not simply a budgetary issue, it is beneficial to look to other states for funding opportunities.



Questions and Answers



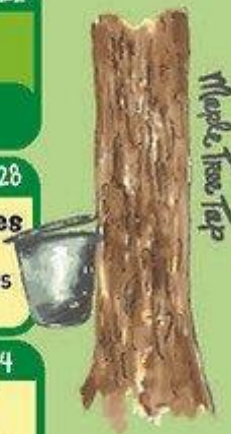
WNESU

March 2025

LUNCH MENU



Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
FREE  Universal MEALS ³	⁴ All students can receive school breakfast & lunch for free	⁵ Pizza VT Organic Whole Grain Crust Seasonal Salad	⁶ Orange Chicken Seasonal Vegetables Brown Rice	⁷ Chicken Alfredo Whole Grain Pasta Steamed Broccoli
¹⁰ Chicken Patty Sandwich Tater Tots	¹¹ Breakfast for Lunch VT Eggs & Maple Syrup VT Potato Homefries	¹² Pizza VT Organic Whole Grain Crust Seasonal Salad	¹³ Mac & Cheese Whole Grain Pasta Sweet Peas	¹⁴ VT Uncured Hot Dog French Fries Early Release
¹⁷ Baked Potato VT Cheese & Toppings Steamed Broccoli	¹⁸ Taco Tuesday Homemade Pico Sweet Corn	¹⁹ Pizza VT Organic Whole Grain Crust Seasonal Salad	²⁰ Orange Chicken Steamed Broccoli Brown Rice	²¹ Inservice
²⁴ Chicken Tenders French Fries Maple Roasted Veg	²⁵ Nachos Supreme VT Queso Cheese Black Beans	²⁶ Pizza VT Organic Whole Grain Crust Seasonal Salad	²⁷ VT Chopped Cheese Sandwich VT Grassfed Beef Grilled Vegetables	²⁸ Chicken & Waffles VT Maple Syrup VT Potato Homefries
³¹ Chicken Parm Sandwich French Fries Sprouts	¹ Breakfast for Lunch VT Eggs & Maple Syrup VT Potato Homefries	² Pizza VT Organic Whole Grain Crust Seasonal Salad	³ General Tso's Chicken Stir Fry Vegetables Brown Rice	⁴ Spaghetti & VT Beef Marinara Italian Green Beans



Fruit & milk is included with every meal. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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