



Maine Regional School Unit 21
School Board Directors
The Schools of Arundel, Kennebunk, and Kennebunkport

"Developing productive global citizens by building knowledge and character."

Matthew Stratford, Board Chair

Leah Bares, Director

Mandy Cummings, Director

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Claudia Sayre, Director

Britney Gerth, Board Vice Chair

Rachel Kennedy-Smith, Director

Abigail Spadone, Director

Gayle Asmussen Spofford, Director

Lesley Stoeffler, Director

Kirstan Watson, Director

April 15, 2025

Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

c/o Legislative Information Office

100 State House Station

Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

We write to you today on behalf of the RSU 21 School Board **to urge your strong support of the amended LD 577: An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program.**

As leaders of a district that serves 2,380 students across Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, and Arundel, we have seen firsthand the powerful impact of universal school meals on student well-being, academic readiness, and family stability. Since Maine implemented School Meals for All, **our district has seen a 65% increase in school meal participation**—up from 200,000 meals in 2018–2019 to approximately 330,000 meals served annually. This surge represents more than numbers; it reflects healthier, more focused students and families who no longer have to worry whether their children will eat during the school day.

According to Feeding America, 1 in 5 children in Maine face food insecurity.¹ Additionally, decades of research show that students who participate in school meal programs experience measurable improvements in both academic performance and behavior. **Maine has long recognized that hungry children cannot learn.** With food insecurity impacting so many children in the state, and the summer months highlighting even more gaps in access to reliable nutrition, it is crucial to protect policies that ensure equitable and consistent meals throughout the school year, and beyond.

We are deeply concerned about proposed federal changes that would significantly narrow eligibility for the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and add administrative burdens through income verification

¹ Maine Feeding America. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/maine> (Accessed April 14, 2025)



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requirements. These rollbacks threaten to reduce federal funding and undermine the success of Maine's School Meals for All policy.

In 2023–2024 alone, RSU 21 received \$308,483 in federal nutrition funds, which, in conjunction with state funding, ensured free meals for all of our students. For many of our students, these meals are the most nutritious they receive each day. The savings, up to \$165 per child per month for families, add up quickly, especially during a time of high living costs.

We strongly urge the Legislature to support this amended bill. The stakes are too high. Our students depend on consistent access to nutrition so they can show up ready to learn, thrive, and reach their full potential.

Thank you for your time, leadership, and commitment to Maine's children.

Sincerely,

Matt Stratford, RSU 21 Board Chair

CC: Dr. Terri Cooper, RSU 21 Superintendent

Katherine Turner, RSU21 Nutrition Director

RSU 21 School Board of Directors

Matt Stratford

RSU 21 School District (Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, and Arundle)

LD 577

Good morning - I have attached a letter submitted on behalf of the RSU 21 School Board to urge your strong support of the amended LD 577: An Act to Maximize Federal Funding and Protect Maine's Universal School Meals Program.