



City of Cambridge

Department of Human Service Programs

51 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
(617) 349-6200, Fax (617) 349-6248

TO: Robert W. Healy, City Manager
FROM: Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager, Human Services
DATE: March 23, 1993
RE: Council Order No. 9, dated 2/1/93, re:
Massachusetts Childhood Hunger Relief Act
Plans for School Breakfast and Summer Feeding Program
for Children

The Massachusetts Childhood Hunger Relief Act makes WIC an entitlement to eligible women and children, commits the State to supporting increased outreach to enroll eligible households in the Food Stamps program, and commits resources to expanding the participation of low income children in the School Breakfast and Summer Food Service Programs. The following information summarizes efforts to-date to address childhood hunger in Cambridge, as they relate to the component pieces of that Act.

WIC

In Cambridge, WIC is administered by the Department of Health and Hospitals. Enrollment is a two-step process, incorporating both an assessment of nutritional risk and a determination of eligibility (income, Massachusetts residence, age of mother and/or child). The Cambridge Hospital is currently examining a number of options for improving WIC services and making them more readily available to the target population.

WIC outreach is one of the responsibilities of the WIC office staff. In addition, Cambridge Community Health Center nurses and nutritionists routinely make referrals to the program. Since Spring 1992, WIC outreach has also been conducted in conjunction with Food Stamp enrollment assistance provided by multilingual outreach workers described in the following section.

Food Stamps (and WIC) Outreach

Cambridge's Food Stamp/WIC outreach and enrollment assistance program exceeds any efforts that could be funded under the Hunger Relief Act. Since Spring 1992, when the City Council first appropriated funding to support such outreach and enrollment assistance (as part of a larger appropriation to enable pantries and meal providers to extend emergency food relief to hungry families), multi-lingual outreach workers have helped over 1,000 eligible City residents apply for Food Stamps, and brought hundreds of thousands of federal Food Stamp dollars into the local economy. Our model of face-to-face assistance

DIVISIONS:

Childcare
349-6200

Community Learning Center
349-6363

Community & Youth
349-6231

Council on Aging/Elderly Services
349-6220

Low Income Fuel Assistance
349-6247

Planning & Development
349-6200

Recreation
349-6230

MultiService Center/Homeless Services
349-6340

has served as an example to other communities and to the state Department of Public Health. Outreach workers are currently funded by a combination of city appropriation, federal block grant dollars, and federal Community Food and Nutrition Program (CFNP) grant funds awarded pursuant to an application submitted by the Department.

Under the Hunger Relief Act, the State Legislature:

- > funded an outreach campaign consultant who will work with Project Bread to develop multi-lingual outreach materials and a multi-media Food Stamp promotion campaign; and
- > appropriated approximately \$70,000 to fund six months of Food Stamps outreach statewide, to be overseen by five regional coordinating programs. Cambridge DHSP staff participated in the state Department of Public Health bidders' conference and worked with the Boston-based Salvation Army to develop the proposal which funded that organization as the regional outreach coordinating agency. Under the Salvation Army's proposal, outreach and enrollment assistance will be conducted by volunteers supervised by a staff person funded through the approximately \$15,000 six-month grant.

While the dissemination of new outreach materials and the media campaign could enhance public awareness and interest in program participation, Cambridge is unlikely to receive any new staffing resources through the Hunger Relief Act for its outreach effort.

School Breakfast

School breakfasts are available to all students, and available to low income students at free or reduced price through a federally funded program. In order to qualify their child for a free or reduced price school breakfast (or lunch), the caregivers of that child must complete an application documenting that their household income is under 130% or 185% of the federal poverty level.

As of January 31, 1993, 58% of 5,927 elementary school students have submitted applications for free or reduced meals. Of these, 69% were found eligible for free meals, 15% were found eligible for reduced price meals, and 16% were found ineligible for a meal subsidy. Of 2,012 high school students, only 22% have applied for a meal subsidy, of whom 86% were found eligible for free meals, 12% were found eligible for reduced price meals, and 2% were found ineligible.

Of the elementary school children found eligible for free meals 88% eat lunch, but only 30% eat breakfast. Of elementary school children found eligible for reduced price meals, 68% eat lunch, but only 4% eat breakfast.

Among high school students found eligible for free meals, 79% eat lunch, but only 16% eat breakfast. Of high school students eligible for reduced price meals, 66% eat lunch, but only 4% eat breakfast.

Two serious interrelated obstacles to greater participation are stigma and transportation. Going to school early to eat breakfast is something that stigmatizes students as being poor. Bus transportation typically arrives only minutes before the start of first period. Those students who eat a school breakfast after arriving by bus are frequently further stigmatized by getting to their first class late.

A possible deterrent to applying for a school meal subsidy is the apparent requirement that the applicant have a Social Security number. In fact, applicants who do not have a Social Security number (primarily non-citizens), may write "None" in place of the requested number without fear of being identified to the INS. However, that option has not been publicized for fear that households who do have Social Security numbers will omit them so that they can submit unverifiable applications which understate their incomes for the purpose of qualifying their children for a subsidy. Compromise outreach language has been recently worked out with School Department and state Department of Education staff, permitting dissemination of accurate information by outreach workers.

A subcommittee of the Advisory Board of the CFNP grant project, staffed by the DHSP, has developed some preliminary recommendations to address low school breakfast participation rates. In particular, the subcommittee is interested in exploring the positive impact of either scheduling more time between the arrival of school buses and the start of first period, or establishing a breakfast break in the middle of the first period or between first and second periods. The group is also interested in exploring ways of distributing food and food vouchers which do not identify subsidy recipients.

DHSP staff have met with School Department staff to initiate a discussion about pilot implementation by interested school principals of some of the subcommittee's recommendations.

School breakfast participation is low statewide. The Department of Education has targeted 12 cities with large numbers of potentially eligible children, including Cambridge, for consulting assistance in developing a more successful breakfast program. In addition to the services of a consultant, we will benefit from a media campaign ("Get a jump on the day with a school breakfast") and school-wide distribution of promotional literature.

Summer Food Service

The Summer Food Service program is a very highly regulated federal program which reimburses sponsors for meals and/or snacks served to eligible children. Eligibility is defined for either a "closed" population (e.g., children enrolled in a summer camp program) or an "open" population (e.g., children living in a neighborhood served by a school in which the majority of students qualified for a free or reduced price meal).

Last summer, 14 programs (primarily day camp programs) hosted the summer food service under the umbrella of the City's contract with the federal government. In addition to serving enrolled populations, the State qualified five of these programs to be "open" sites which were able to serve a drop-in population. This open site component is an expansion of the program from previous years.

Although no exact unduplicated count of children served is available, we know that at least 992 different children (and possibly as many as 1,500 children) participated in the City-sponsored program for some portion of the summer -- up from 750 the previous year. Camps lasted 4-9 weeks, and most campers typically enrolled for two or more 2-week sessions. The average participant probably received subsidized meals for close to four weeks during the summer.

The overwhelming majority of these summer meal program participants were campers; only a very small percentage were children who "dropped-in" at "open" sites sponsored by the City. In addition to the 992-plus children who participated in the summer meals program through City-affiliated programs, an unknown number of children received federally subsidized meals through participation in private camps and child care programs. The number of children who receive subsidized meals during the school year who need, but do not receive subsidized meals during the summer, is unknown.

Summer food service participation is felt to be unacceptably low across the state and country. The Massachusetts Department of Education will follow up its school breakfast campaign with a campaign to assist the same twelve cities -- including Cambridge -- in boosting participation in the summer meals program.

Discussions between DHSP staff, community advocates, and the state Department of Education suggest that there are several potentially productive approaches to improving participation:

- creating less expensive non-camp alternative activities between 9 AM and noon
- increasing outreach through the schools and other channels
- implementing multi-lingual outreach



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
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EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

March 29, 1993

To The Honorable, The City Council:

With reference to Awaiting Report Item No. 17, regarding the Massachusetts Childhood Hunger Relief Act plans for School Breakfast and Summer Feeding Program for Children, please find attached a response received from Jill Herold, Assistant City Manager for Human Services, concerning this issue.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Healy", is written over a horizontal line.

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mev
attachment

Consent Agenda # 3

5-149
Awaiting Report Item No. 17, regarding
the Massachusetts Childhood Hunger
Relief Act plans for School Breakfast
and Summer Feeding Program for Children.

In City Council,

March 29, 1993

*Placed on file
Mayor to pursue
issue thru School
Dept. & Human
Services Dept.*