

Washington West Supervisory Union
School Year 2016-2017 Administrative Review conducted on May 10-12, 2017
Review Report Addendum

In school year 2017-2018, the Washington West Supervisory Union will become the Harwood Union Unified School District. In light of this transition, there lies a valuable opportunity for the administration of the school food service program to be more efficient and effective.

Our findings from the recent administrative review revealed that the four food service directors do not have the capacity to perform mandatory administrative tasks. Our procurement review showed that the directors are aware of procurement regulations, but as a couple of them voiced they simply “don’t have the time” to take the actions necessary to be in compliance. The State Agency strongly recommends that the SU develop a plan for more coordination and streamlined oversight of administrative and procurement tasks, including conducting on-site monitoring reviews, developing Requests for Proposals (RFP), purchasing, menu planning, and contract management to increase efficiency and to ensure regulatory compliance.

Currently, the four directors meet a few times a year with Michelle Baker and Brigid Nease. These meetings are a great strategy and we encourage that this becomes a more regular practice. This provides an opportunity for in-house professional development and for staff to share questions and concerns, as well as best practices. Although this does not replace attending larger trainings, it offers value to the staff and can serve to cut down on travel costs.

Implementing menu planning and ordering on an SFA-level will allow for the time and commitment needed to conduct proper procurement. Forecasting and cycle menu planning are proven procurement strategies to help cut down on food costs. This collaboration still leaves room for individual menu decisions and variety from each director. All the schools in the SFA clearly prioritize quality, nutrition, and serving local foods. These shared values could easily be leveraged into bulk ordering allowing for lower prices.

The Stage Agency has several recommendations for improving the financial state of the non-profit school food service account. First, it is recommended that the SFA increase the adult meal price to five dollars. The meals served at the schools within the Washington West Supervisory Union are incredibly high quality and are the most convenient and affordable meals available to faculty and staff, even with a price increase.

Second, the SFA should consider developing a uniform salad bar “policy”. During the review, food service directors expressed concern with faculty and staff taking advantage of the “extras” on the salad bars, like dressings and toppings. These items have costs associated with them, and the school meals program cannot subsidize staff lunches. Examples of steps other schools have taken to address this issue include:

1. Selling salad dressing or other toppings separately in pre-portioned cups;
2. Pricing everything from the salad bar by weight;

3. If the adult meal price is increased to the recommended amount of \$5.00, a salad bar meal could have a slightly lower price point of possibly \$4.00 provided that the adults only make a meal from that which is available on the salad bar itself.

Third, there should be consistent paid-status student meal prices across the SFA. It can vary among grade levels, but it is strongly recommended that all the elementary schools have the same price. We do recognize that the cost of producing a meal differs depending on factors like location, infrastructure, and economies of scale, but having a consistent price for each grade group will serve to provide equity in regards to school choice that will come into effect in School Year 2017-2018. As the individual school food service program accounts will be consolidated into one, the price per meal should be established for the SU, not for each individual school.

Erika Dolan and Thatcher Brook Primary School should be commended for the successful implementation of a Grab and Go Breakfast, based in the lobby of the school. Whether they take the bus, are dropped off, or participate in before-school running club, the lobby is a crossroads through which all students must pass. Erika identified the problem of low breakfast participation and explored different solutions, such as introducing new and different menu items, before identifying this Alternative Service Delivery Model as a great way to increase participation. This model could be replicated in the other schools.

In School Year 2017-2018, every SFA must have an SFA-level Meal Charge Policy. The policy can vary by grade level, with elementary practices different from high school, but it cannot vary from elementary school to elementary school. Currently, when students with meal debt leave Crosset Brook Middle School and enter into Harwood Union High School, their negative accounts are wiped clean. This puts a burden on the food service account at Crosset Brook. As the SFA consolidates, the Meal Charge Policy should dictate how end of the year debts are handled on an SFA-level. For more information, please refer to the Vermont Agency of Education Child Nutrition Programs Meal Charge Policy Memo.

Currently, the Fayston School District provides meals to the Waitsfield School District through a vended meals agreement. Fayston charges Waitsfield more for these meals than what Waitsfield charges for their paid-status meals, thus Waitsfield is losing money. Next year they will be the same school district, eliminating this issue.

The directors at Washington West SU are dedicated and knowledgeable, but do not have the time to complete some of the higher-level, administrative tasks required to comply with federal regulations. Consolidation of some tasks up to an SFA-level performed by an SFA-level director could rectify this situation and would allow for a more robust program.