



**SCHOOL COMMITTEE**

*Susan K. McCready – Chairperson*  
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*Emily DiCesaro*  
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Magda Parvey, Ed.D.  
*Superintendent of Schools*

April 7, 2023

The Honorable Maura Healey, Governor of Massachusetts,  
State Senator Barry Finegold,  
State Representatives Tram T. Nguyen,  
State Representative Frank A. Moran,

Please accept this letter as the Andover School Committee's statement of strong support for the Universal Free School Meals program in Massachusetts. As you may be aware, 10% of Andover Public School students are eligible for free and reduced meals and even more face food insecurity. In addition, below we have highlighted other important reasons that support our request for the legislature to pass, and the governor to sign, a law that continues the Universal Free School Meals program indefinitely.

- Students who eat free and nutritious meals at school reduce financial strain on the family food budget, which has increased significantly during this period of extraordinary inflation.
- Nearly 25% of food insecure students are not eligible for free and reduced meals under current federal guidelines, leaving many families without healthy meal options for their children if they must pay for school meals.
- Kids who participate in school meals are more likely to eat fruits, vegetables, and milk. These nutrient-dense foods contribute to a healthier Body Mass Index (BMI) and lower childhood obesity.
- National School Lunch Program lunches provide one-third or more of the recommended levels for key nutrients.
- Research shows a well-nourished child is a better learner, test-taker, and participant in school.
- Students experiencing hunger are more likely to have behavior and attention problems and higher rates of suspensions and excessive absences.
- Offering free meals to all children helps to end the stigma associated with needs based free and reduced lunches and eliminates lunch shaming when a student has an overdrawn account.
- Districts no longer would have to utilize resources to collect unpaid meal fees from families (a process which often results in shame and resentment when we are trying to build stronger, more connected communities.)

We appreciate the commitment shown for this program by bill co-sponsors, Rep. Nguyen and Rep. Moran, and respectfully request their ongoing support for the bill. We also appreciate the supplemental budget proposed by Governor Healey, which includes funding to continue this program. Thank you for your commitment to the health, well-being, and financial security of Massachusetts public school students.

Respectfully,  
Andover School Committee

Susan K. McCready  
*School Committee Chair*

Tracey Spruce  
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