

Richmond parent calls for national school lunch program



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A Gilmore parent is calling for a national school lunch program. | Peter Cade/Getty Images

A Gilmore parent is appealing to Richmond city council and the board of education to push for a national school lunch program.

Not only is it hard for kids to learn and succeed when they're hungry, it's stigmatizing to be part of a program set up for students in need, said Gilmore parent Chaslynn Gillanders.

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Having a program for school lunches for all students would take away from the stigma, she added.

Because of the high cost of living in Richmond and elsewhere, families are putting a lot of their money just into shelter and transportation, leaving less for food.

This has been exacerbated by the pandemic that hit the economy hard, Gillanders added.

Several non-profits in Canada have called for a national school food program, saying Canada is the only G7 country that doesn't have one. Some point out Canada has a "patchwork" system of providing school lunches.

The Richmond School District has a food program called "Feed-U-Cate 38" whose mandate includes "to invite the community to make donations that will support these breakfast, lunch, and snack programs for elementary and secondary students in need."

Other charitable organizations also provide school meals, for example, St. Anne's, a Richmond church, prepares meals five days a week for students at McNair and Hugh Boyd students.

The parent advisory committee at Gilmore elementary donated \$1,000 at Christmas so families who needed it could get a gift card for food.

But providing healthy food to those in need is something Gillanders thinks should be the responsibility of the government.

Gillanders has now written to both city council and the school board asking them to call on the national government to establish a school lunch program.

“It has to be done, it’s just a need and it has to happen,” Gillanders said.

In 2020, the mayor of Vancouver wrote a similar letter to the federal government, pointing out “a school food program on a national scale is essential to address inequality and ensure all Canadian children learn basic food skills and have access to healthy meals that support classroom learning.”

Vancouver Mayor Kennedy Stewart noted in his letter that the City of Vancouver donates more than \$2 million to various school food programs.

Gillanders is challenging the City of Richmond to have a cost-sharing program with the national government to provide school lunches.

Richmond Food Bank statistics show 2,200 people in Richmond are accessing their services weekly, and 32 per cent of those benefiting are children.

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