

draft SC letter on extending universal lunch
05/12/22
Susan Taylor

Dear Senator Barrett,

We write to urge you to promote speedy passage of Senate Bill 314 extending universal free lunch programs in all Massachusetts public schools. More than 600 students in the Lincoln Public Schools, both in Lincoln and on the Hanscom Air Force Base, benefit from the federal universal lunch subsidy that ends on June 30. We need this legislation now!

Our schools' food services have been essential for students whose supports have been disrupted by the pandemic and now are strained by the soaring cost of food.

Lincoln school lunch was \$3 for a decade before the pandemic. Food costs will drive that price to nearly \$5 this fall -- \$20 a week for one child is out-of-reach for too many of our families of moderate income.

We see increasing numbers of families struggling to manage on incomes that won't qualify in the fall for federal lunch assistance (below \$50,000 a year for a family of four) based on applications for our district's fee assistance program. About 15 percent of students in the Lincoln district will remain eligible for federally free or reduced lunch, but that only begins to meet the need. Since the start of the pandemic, the St. Vincent de Paul food pantry that serves 120 households in our small community has seen a 64% increase in the number of people served.

Until all our children have access to nutritious food and the emotional support it provides, we will not have recovered from the trauma of the past two years. We aren't there yet. We need your help. Please do everything you can to move S-314 forward for a favorable vote.