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Davis: Universal School Meals is good for business

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by Cathy Davis Vermont families with children were five times more likely to experience hunger in 2021, according to a survey from the University of Vermont. And as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact income and long-term savings, kids' nutrition is attended to for many at one place — school.

As the pandemic spread, the federal government stepped in with waivers that allowed all children to eat breakfast and lunch at school at no cost to their families. These waivers are set to expire in June, and childhood hunger is still a constant threat for far too many Vermonters.

Why are we thinking of taking food away from our kids when they still need it?

Vermont's House Education Committee is digging into a bill that would require all schools to offer two meals per day to every student, without charge, making school meals an educational expense, as they should be.

We hope the committee and all legislators will support that bill.

You may ask, "How do free breakfast and lunches for Vermont students impact the economy, business community, and myself?" The answer is simple: Kids who are well-fed can more easily develop, grow, and learn. By empowering them

to sit in class without hunger pangs and brain fog, we are helping them succeed in their studies and to eventually join — and lead — Vermont's workforce.

As business owners, we are looking for every edge we can find these days. Being able to recruit workers into Vermont by telling them their kids get a great education here, and they will be fed and focused because our schools provide healthy meals, is a significant benefit. These meals — which include many local foods — are available to every student, every day, would make a difference for our businesses.

When parents or guardians aren't stressed about getting their kids' meals packed in the morning, or remembering to charge up their school meals accounts, one important item is lifted from their own plates.

And when our Vermont students are treated equitably, and don't have to face stigma in the cafeteria, they can learn better and focus on following their passions, making them more likely to succeed at school and later the workforce.

Universal school meals is good for students, good for business, and good for Vermont — we hope the Vermont Legislature will enact it this year.

We invite you to add your name to the list of businesses and organizations who have signed on in support of universal school meals at

<https://www.universalschoolmealsvt.org/get-involved/organizational-sign-on>.

Cathy Davis of Jericho is the board president of Hunger Free Vermont

The Abbey Group, Enosburg Falls, VT

The Alchemist, Stowe, VT

Cabot Creamery, Waitsfield, VT

City Market Onion River Co-Op, Burlington, VT

Clean Yield Asset Management, Norwich, VT

CW Creative, Barre, VT

Forward Philanthropy, Montpelier, VT

Grass Cattle Company, Charlotte, VT

Groennfell Meadery, St. Albans, VT

Hotel Vermont, Burlington, VT

King Arthur Baking, Norwich, VT

Lake Champlain Chamber of Commerce

Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op, Middlebury, VT

National Life Group, Montpelier, VT

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