

May 4, 2022

Dear Senators,

On behalf of the Essex Westford School Board, I would like to urge you to support the passage of House Bill S. 100. For the past two years, we have seen the positive impact that universal meals have had on students, schools, families and our community at large.

- Since the start of the pandemic (03-18-2020), EWSD Child Nutrition has served nearly 1.4 million meals.
- Participation has increased 30% to 40% across the district when compared to pre-pandemic rates.
- Some of the most significant growth in participation is at the high school level with lunch participation rates sometimes reaching 80%.
- Child Nutrition is on track this fiscal year to serve approximately 600,000 meals.

When we think of ways that State funding can quickly have the most impact, and can positively support the **social-emotional and educational goals** for schools throughout our State, I can think of no better way than to invest to ensure that all of our students have access to nutritious meals – breakfast and lunch each day.

When we think of our goal of providing educational equity to all students, how can we achieve that equity when we have hungry children? How can we aspire to educational equity when we know that many of our children are not able to have equity in basic human needs?

When we think of giving students every support we possibly can as our schools work to provide recovery from the past two years of the pandemic, nutritious meals that can be relied upon by students and their families are key to that effort. Students have told us that meals free from stress and concern over affordability and choice are both welcome and essential.

To be clear: School districts in our State can't support an unfunded mandate from the legislature. Key to our support for this Bill is that the State Educational Fund pay for the cost of these meals (the remaining cost after all federal funds have been applied). This is the only way that meals can truly be universal in our State.

Thank you all for your work on this legislation, and please feel free to reach out to me if I can be a resource in any way.

Respectfully Submitted,

Erin Kennedy Knox
Chair
EWSD School Board

