



# VANCOUVER and DISTRICT LABOUR COUNCIL



November 21, 2019

Vancouver School Board Trustees  
Via Email

Dear Vancouver School Board Trustees,

Subject: Proposed Cuts to Culinary Arts Program, Cafeterias, and Food for  
Students in Need

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I am writing on behalf of the Vancouver and District Labour Council and its nearly 100 affiliate union locals and 60,000 unionized workers in the Vancouver area.

We are very alarmed by the proposals of the Food Services Working Group to cut the Culinary Arts Program, cafeterias, and food for students in need.

Proceeding with this plan would be a tremendous loss for staff, students, and the local economy. It would mean a loss of educational opportunities for students who want to learn culinary skills from Red Seal chefs, gaining skills which will serve them well throughout their lives and can open the door to careers in the food service and hospitality industry. It should be noted that the food service industry requires an estimated 21,000 skilled workers by 2021, and thousands more after that. These changes threaten to undermine the supply of new skilled workers to industry.

Closing non-teaching cafeterias would deprive students of healthy and nutritious meals and leave them either to visit nearby fast food establishments or potentially to go hungry. Further, it would put numerous workers, many of whom are long-term employees, out of a job. As you know, these are members of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 963 and the Vancouver Secondary Teachers Association, both affiliates of our council.

We also understand that these proposed changes were not raised to IUOE during the recent round of collective bargaining. While our council cannot and would not presume to speak on behalf of IUOE, in my personal estimation as a long-time labour activist and professional Union Representative this would constitute an act of bargaining in bad faith if it is allowed to proceed. We also understand that the union has been unable to get basic information from VSB management about the proposal. This has become an issue to the extent that they are now in the process of appealing Freedom of Information requests which VSB management denied.



Yet, while VSB management has put these cafeterias in their sights, private cafeterias would continue to be subsidized by taxpayers even though they do not follow the Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in BC Schools for healthy nutrition. These are guidelines that VSB operated cafeterias must follow, creating an unfair and counter-productive dynamic between private and VSB operated services. The result is that sugary drinks, deep fried food, bottled water and other products will continue to be sold for profit and against the guidelines that VSB is supposed to uphold.

Finally, privatization and/or contracting out of meal programs end hot meals in schools and reduce quality. Moving from a universal delivery model to a needs-based one will also lead to stigmatization that will harm students and closing the school kitchens will eliminate yet more learning opportunities for students.

We therefore join with IUOE Local 963, VSTA, as well as the BC Restaurant and Food Services Association, and others, in calling for action to increase enrollment in the Culinary Arts Program and expand it, not cut it. This would include opening new teaching cafeterias west of Main Street where, shockingly, none presently exist.

We note with concern that the Food Service Working Group members consist entirely of VSB management personnel. We have learned that no input was sought from other stakeholders such as students, parents, teachers, Culinary Arts Program chefs, or unions representing VSB teachers and staff. In our view, all of these groups ought to have been consulted as they would have vital information and perspectives which cannot be ignored.

VSB Trustees must reject this report and its recommendations in their entirety. Not to do so would be a betrayal of staff and students alike. These changes will damage the learning conditions and opportunity of students, destroy good jobs, and harm the economy.

What we need instead is a vision for an expanded Culinary Arts Program, one which will fully realize the benefits that the current program has to offer, and expand it to further benefit students, staff, and the community. VSB Trustees are not bound by reports from staff or consultant agencies. As elected representatives of the voting public, Trustees have the power and the ability to chart their own path based on a vision for a better education system. We look forward to supporting you in doing just that.

Yours truly,



Stephen Von Sychowski  
President, VDLC

CC: VDLC Executive Board