Local teachers leave for more money, support

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Maggie McCabe can point to the exact moment she knew she had to leave her job as a Stafford County high school English and creative writing teacher.

"The first moment that I mentally checked out when I was with a student—that's what broke me," said McCabe. "Students feel safe with us and want to talk, especially my creative writing students. But I couldn't focus. And the students deserve more than that."

DAVE ELLIS FOR THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Battlefield Middle School teacher Heather Drane is considering leaving Spotsylvania for better pay.

McCabe, who was in her fifth year as a public school teacher, quit her job Feb. 5 and now works for a local nonprofit. She is one of the many teachers both locally and nationwide who are thinking about or already have walked away from a profession many of them dreamed of going into since they were students themselves.

McCabe said she always knew she wasn't going to make a lot of money as a teacher and that it was going to be a time-consuming and stressful job—but it's the only job she can recall ever wanting to do.

"I pictured myself making a difference and being a constant for many students who don't have that in their lives," McCabe said. "I thought I could be a resource for low-income students, because that was my background."

McCabe started her teaching career in Caroline County and then moved to Stafford. She found that the demographics were different between the two divisions, but the pressures on teachers were the same.

"I realized it's not the county, it's the system," McCabe said. "It seems like there is just a national acceptance that teachers are treated as 'less than.' It's just assumed that they

SEE TEACHERS, A14

TEACHERS

▶ FROM A1

will work beyond their contract hours and have a lot of stressors that they should just accept."

McCabe's contracted work week was 40 hours, but she was spending an additional two or three unpaid hours every weeknight and half of every Sunday grading or prepping for lessons. Her husband is also a teacher, and there was little time left for them to take care of their house or spend time together as a couple.

In spring 2020, when schools abruptly shut down, McCabe felt hopeful that society would finally see the effort and dedication teachers put into their jobs.

"It felt like teachers were finally being seen for what we did, and acknowledged. But it was so incredibly short-lived," she said.

As the country slogged into the second year of the pandemic, McCabe noticed a change in the way people were talking about teachers.

"I think people needed someone to be angry at," she said. "Teachers became Public Enemy No. 1. People resented that teachers were working at home. They thought they were babysitting their own children while teachers were not really working. I had to delete so many friends [on social media] because I couldn't get up and do my job the next day because of how we were being talked to."

McCabe felt undone by the lack of respect for a job she had always been proud of and had gone into debt to achieve.

At school, she couldn't keep performing the role of professional, competent teacher. At home, she was no longer practicing any self-care.

"It became scary," she said. "I was in this vegetative state. At school, kids would ask me, 'What's wrong?'"

In February, she became the third teacher or paraeducator in the English department at her school to quit mid-year.

"I'm giving myself time to heal," McCabe said.

A WORSENING TREND

Multiple recent studies have found that teachers are leaving or thinking about leaving their jobs—and often the profession—at a higher rate than they were before the pandemic, worsening a trend that has existed in the U.S. for decades.

According to a 2017 report on teacher turnover conducted by the Learning Policy Institute, an education research and policy think tank, teacher attrition—the percentage of teachers leaving the profession—increased from 5.1% in 1992 to 8.4% in 2005.

"The 3% increase in attrition rates is not trivial: It amounts to about 90,000 additional teachers needing to be hired across the U.S. each year," the report states, noting that attrition is higher in the U.S. than in other

DAVE ELLIS FOR THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Battlefield Middle School teacher Heather Drane says she can make more money working as a teacher in counties such as Stafford and Prince William.

countries.

In addition to the 8% of teachers who leave the profession, another 8% of teachers move to different schools each year, making the total annual turnover rate 16%, the LPI report states.

The total turnover rate hovered around 16% for years. But a handful of recent studies suggest that turnover might be higher now than pre-pandemic.

According to a survey of educators conducted early last year by the RAND Corporation, 23% of all teachers—and half of all Black teachers—said they were likely to leave their current teaching jobs by the end of the 2020–21 school year.

The RAND survey also found that teachers report experiencing job-related stress and symptoms of depression at higher rates than the general adult population. Seventy-eight percent of teachers said they experience frequent job-related stress, compared to 40% of the general population—and 40% of teachers experienced symptoms of depression, compared to 10% of the general population.

An EdWeek Research Center survey of about 700 teachers and 300 school leaders conducted in March 2021 found that 54% of teachers said they are either "somewhat" or "very likely" to leave teaching in the next two years, compared to 34% who said they would have answered that way before the pandemic.

According to the EdWeek survey, 84% of teachers said their jobs are more stressful now than they were pre-pandemic.

The National Education Association conducted a similar survey of its members in January, and found that 55% of them are planning to leave education sooner than they anticipated because of the pandemic, regardless of their age or years of experience.

In Stafford County, 141 school division employees—67 licensed teachers and 74 service staff—resigned their positions midway through last school year, up from 80 total employees who

According to a survey of educators conducted early last year by the RAND Corporation, 23% of all teachers—and half of all Black teachers—said they were likely to leave their current teaching jobs by the end of the 2020–21 school year.

left during the 2019–20 school year.

So far this year, 135 employees—35 licensed staff and 100 service staff—have left.

In Spotsylvania County, 167 school division staff have resigned so far this year, up from 137 last school year and 93 during the 2019–20 school year.

When Spotsylvania teachers responded to "intent to return" forms in December, 13% indicated that they are "undecided" about returning for the 2022–23 school year—compared to 5% who answered that way last year.

When educators leave, divisions must spend money to replace them, by paying human resources staff to process the exit, and spending more money on recruiting, hiring and training new employees.

The 2017 LPI report estimated that it costs $11,000 to replace a teacher in a suburban district such as Spotsylvania—making the estimated cost to the division of replacing the 167 educators who resigned this year $1.8 million.

PROBLEMS OF PAY

According to the Education Week survey, raising salaries is the No. 1 action school districts can take to retain their teachers. Respondents to the NEA survey also said increasing salaries would be the most effective way to address teacher burnout.

"I knew from the start [that I wasn't going to make a lot of money], but I thought the reward would balance that out," McCabe said. "And it does, to some extent, but the reward does not pay my bills. If I could pay the bills through the gratitude of my students, that would be something."

A 2017 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development looked at the education data from its 35 member countries and found that in the U.S., teachers are paid on average less than 60% of the salaries of similarly educated professionals.

Heather Drane, a middle school social studies and English teacher in Spotsylvania, said she feels the societal expectation is that teachers should accept lower salaries because "it's about the kids."

"Frankly, I think there's a certain level of misogyny involved," Drane said. "This is a female-led profession, traditionally, and it's very undervalued because of that. People are more willing to use these levers of guilt—'Well, it's about the children' and 'Don't you care about the kids?'—to manipulate and control a group of people who have given their life to civil service."

Drane is considering taking a job with a different school division next year because she said Spotsylvania County has "normalized" not giving its teachers cost-of-living increases.

As a result, a 30-year teacher in Spotsylvania makes $40,000 less than a 30-year teacher in Prince William County, Drane said. The less money that a teacher makes, the less he or she is able to pay into Virginia's retirement system for state employees.

The promise of a pension at the end of a career is what can make a teacher's comparatively low salary, relative to other professions that require similar education, palatable, Drane said.

"It's part of the whole compensation package for a teacher, which people don't understand," she said. "I get paid for 10 months of work. Over the summer, I get paid for work I've already done.

"It's a commitment that was made to me when I was hired, that someday my hard work would benefit me by providing me with a retirement income I could rely on," Drane continued. "The fewer step increases, the longer it will take for me to be able to retire. That's going against the heart and soul of the way teachers are compensated in our country. It's really an evil thing to do."

But mid-career teachers like Drane are also up against school divisions that often cap the years of experience they will accept of new hires.

"If I don't leave, I could be up against a point where I'm trapped here," Drane said.

Spotsylvania and Stafford have requested funding to begin fixing problems of teacher salary scale compression in their budgets for the next fiscal year, but Drane said that won't help people who have put in decades of service.

LACK OF SUPPORT

The Rand survey also found that teachers are more likely to leave when they don't feel supported by school leadership and the community.

Angela King, a middle school special education teacher in Spotsylvania, said that's the main reason why she will not return to her position next year.

"I absolutely love what I do," King said. "But it's the lack of support from higher up. What sent me over was when [the Spotsylvania School Board] fired [former superintendent] Dr. Baker. I thought, if they can fire him, I'm nobody, and honestly, I was afraid."

King said she feels the School Board has become distracted by "what we call a loud minority" of community members who have been vocal at meetings this year in opposition to mask mandates, critical race theory and "sexually explicit" books in school libraries.

Instead, she'd like to see school division leadership support teachers by "showing up in school buildings" to see what teachers actually do and funding a budget that gives teachers what they truly need.

"I'd like to see them put us as a priority, not the parents who are threatening them," King said. "Give us the $1,000 bonus you promised us. Adjust our pay scale so it matches what other divisions are doing."

Drane also said she sees public outcry over "divisive topics" in school curriculum as a distraction.

"It seems to just be a political issue that people are using to try to push a wedge between parents and the school systems," she said, adding that neither she nor anyone she knows has ever been contacted by a parent with a concern about the topic of a lesson.

"Nobody's coming to our schools with those complaints," Drane said. "All this stuff started happening running up to the gubernatorial race. To me, it's the most blatant politics you can possibly imagine."

King always saw herself as a public servant teaching the next generation, but said politics has made that responsibility intolerable.

"I'm coming home from work in tears half the time," she said. "It's not worth it."

'WE'RE THE ONES $65,000 IN DEBT TO DO THIS'

McCabe said there are concrete steps, in addition to improving pay, that school divisions can take to retain their teachers. One is creating a culture that prioritizes teachers' mental health and physical wellbeing.

"I had been telling my students to prioritize their mental health and I felt like a phony, because I wasn't doing it for myself," McCabe said.

In a special report on retaining teachers during the pandemic published last spring, Education Week made several suggestions for how school leadership can support mental health, such as normalizing talking about mental health or needing to take time off to recharge; training employees to act as mental health ambassadors; setting up help lines within the division; and reducing barriers to getting insurance-covered counseling or therapy services.

Drane said teachers need to be treated as professionals and given less busy work and more free time during the day to collaborate with colleagues.

"We are bombarded with 'professional development,'" she said. "They feel like, if they're not budgeting every single minute of our day full of stuff, that somehow we're getting paid for not doing work."

McCabe said she thinks society doesn't understand or respect the degrees or credentials required to become a licensed teacher.

"I don't go into a hospital, take out a scalpel and start operating," she said. "We're the ones who are $65,000 in debt to do this, and have to take continuing education to prove that we can still do the job we were hired for."

Drane said teachers need to advocate for themselves more clearly. She said she tries to jump on opportunities to educate her students and the public on how teachers are compensated, how hard teachers work and how much they care about their students.

"I'm in there with 60 English students and 50 history students every day and I need to be prepared for them. There isn't anybody else there picking up the slack," she said. "Teachers are some of the people most committed to their jobs that I've ever met."

McCabe said that dedication is helping former teachers get jobs in other professions.

"Employers are gobbling us up," she said.

Adele Uphaus-Conner:
540/735-1973
auphaus@freelancestar.com
@flsadele

Dad seeking changes to schools' restraint policy

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

When Adam Blosser arrived at Wilderness Elementary School on the morning of Friday, Oct. 22, he could hear from the parking lot the sounds of his son Hudson, 9, screaming inside the school.

Principal Dianne Holmes met Blosser in the school office and walked with him to Hudson's self-contained autism classroom.

"We walked into the classroom. Hudson was lying on his back on the floor being held down by his teacher, his occupational therapist and the assistant principal," Blosser said.

When Hudson saw his father, the three staff members released him and Blosser did what any parent would do with a child in distress.

"I comforted my son," he said.

It was not until days later, after going through all of Hudson's daily school reports from August through October with the boy's private applied behavior analysis provider, that Blosser was able to understand what he'd witnessed and process its significance.

Hudson had been placed under physical restraint, an intervention that restricts a child's movements and is disproportionately used on students with disabilities,

SEE RESTRAINT, A10

VIEW: Adam Blosser comments on restraint and seclusion practices in schools. To watch, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link.

PETER CIHELKA / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Spotsylvania residents Adam and Ashley Blosser are advocating for the county school system to update its policy on restraint and seclusion of children with special needs.

RESTRAINT

▶ FROM A1

according to a 2019 Government Accountability Office study on how the practice is used in K–12 schools.

The Virginia Department of Education has regulated the use of physical restraint—as well as seclusion, in which children are isolated in a room or space—since 2015, when the General Assembly enacted legislation requiring the department to do so.

Despite what Blosser saw on Oct. 22, Spotsylvania County Public Schools did not officially acknowledge that Hudson had been restrained until April, after the Blossers initiated a complaint this spring with the Department of Education's division of Special Education and Student Services.

The complaint alleged that Hudson was "unnecessarily and illegally restrained" at Wilderness Elementary at least once and that "school staff failed to follow Virginia Code and division policy in properly reporting the use of restraint."

The Blossers settled their complaint with the school division through mediation in April.

In an April 4 report, Tedra Richardson, executive director of student support services, wrote that "SCPS failed to inform the parents of the use of restraint in the educational setting" on Oct. 22, that "illegal use of restraint" occurred because not all staff members involved in the restraint were trained in the practice and that the division failed to properly report the incident to the VDOE.

Richardson also acknowledged that on Oct. 25, Hudson was subject to "illegal use of restraint" by being held down on the floor, which the "Mandt System of crisis intervention does not support," and that the division again failed to properly notify the Blossers and the VDOE of the incident.

In December, Hudson transferred to another county elementary school, where he has stabilized and made progress, Blosser said.

He said he is not angry with Hudson's teacher at Wilderness Elementary or with Richardson about the incident. But he does see a possible systemic problem in how restraint and seclusion are documented and reported by the school division, and he believes division policy on the practice is not in compliance with state code.

"I've been able to advocate for Hudson," Blosser said. "I've been able to accomplish what we needed to accomplish for him, but only because we forced [the school division's] hand at every turn. The reality is that not every child has the same support system as Hudson does, so I feel a responsibility to raise awareness."

'IT MUST BE AN EMERGENCY SITUATION'

The VDOE regulations on restraint and seclusion were most recently updated in January 2021.

They permit the use of restraint and seclusion in only five instances—to "prevent a student from inflicting serious physical harm or injury to self or others;" to "quell a disturbance or remove a student from the scene of a disturbance in which such student's behavior or damage to property threatens serious physical harm or injury to persons;" to "defend self or others from serious physical harm or injury;" and to obtain weapons or controlled substances from a student.

"In state code, the threshold is very high," Blosser said. "It must be an emergency situation."

The restraint and seclusion polices in place at Stafford County and Fredericksburg City public schools only permit the practice in the same five circumstances described in the state regulations.

Spotsylvania's policy, most recently revised in February 2020, permits restraint in less critical situations, such as "to prevent imminent destruction to school or another person's property" and "to direct the movement or actions of a student to avoid the undue or deliberate disruption of the learning environment."

VDOE regulations also prohibit the use of mechanical restraint, but this is not prohibited in Spotsylvania's policy.

In addition to bringing its policy into compliance with state code—which he calls "the bare minimum"—Blosser would like to see Spotsylvania prohibit the use of both prone, or face down, and supine, or face up, floor restraint.

Fairfax County Public Schools in December 2021 announced that it would prohibit both types of floor restraint—in addition to completely phasing out the practice of seclusion—as part of a settlement agreement the division reached with parents and disability rights advocates who had initiated a lawsuit.

'NO DOUBT THAT IT IS UNDER-REPORTED'

Blosser is also advocating for the school division to study how restraint is reported.

"I have no doubt that it is under-reported," he said.

He said he thinks Hudson was restrained more frequently than the school division has acknowledged.

Beginning on Oct. 18, Hudson's daily school reports document his teacher's physical response to

> The reality is that not every child has the same support system as Hudson does, so I feel a responsibility to raise awareness.
>
> —ADAM BLOSSER

Hudson's behavior challenges, which had been increasing throughout the fall and included throwing classroom objects, climbing on furniture, kicking and head-butting.

In the daily reports, the teacher describes "holding on to student's arm," "giving pressure on the floor," "[holding] student's shoulders," "put[ting] [Hudson] in not ready position," "[giving] pressure" while "[holding] on to him" and "[grabbing]" him off furniture.

The daily reports also document Hudson being "put" in the body sock—a stretchy pouch often used in occupational therapy to provide a sensory experience.

"[The body sock] has to be used proactively rather than reactively," Blosser said. "We are concerned that Hudson's teacher started using the body sock as a means of controlling Hudson rather than meeting his sensory needs."

State code defines "physical restraint" as "a personal restriction that immobilizes or reduces the ability of a student to move freely" but notes that the term does not include "incidental, minor, or reasonable physical contact."

Blosser said that to him, the daily notes show that physical restraint was used more often than the two times acknowledged by the school division, and that Hudson would have experienced everything described by the teacher as restraint.

"A student with autism doesn't understand what is happening," he said. "The teacher escalated her behavior to address his. Once she restrained him, all trust was gone."

In her narrative of the Oct. 22 and Oct. 25 incidents, the teacher described "holding" down [Hudson's] legs and arms" and "[laying] him down ... while teacher held on to arms."

Blosser said this vague terminology resulted in those incidents of restraint not being reported to him, the school division or the VDOE.

Holmes, the Wilderness Elementary principal, told Blosser in a Dec. 6 email that after reviewing the daily notes, she "could not identify any times that indicated [Hudson] was restrained."

Richardson wrote in a Nov. 30 email to Blosser that "the incident reports and daily communication sheets do not document any instances of restraint in the educational setting."

Four months later, SCPS acknowledged that Hudson was restrained on Oct. 22 and Oct. 25.

For Blosser, this points to a systemic problem with how school personnel understand and report restraint when it happens, which leads to it being under-reported.

"I am not naïve to assume that this was an isolated occurrence," he said.

The 2019 study by the Government Accountability Office found that U.S. schools routinely underreported how often students are restrained or secluded, entering that zero instances occurred when, in fact, the data isn't available and the field should be left blank.

Fairfax County Public Schools was among the larger school districts that reported zero instances of restraint and seclusion for multiple years. However, after reviewing its use of seclusion and restraint to manage student behavior, the district announced in April 2019 that there were actually 1,679 such incidents affecting 203 students in the 2017–18 school year.

Blosser addressed the Spotsylvania School Board at its April 11 meeting, asking for the school division's policy to be brought into compliance and for floor and mechanical restraint, as well as seclusion, to be prohibited.

"You're going to hear more from me on this topic," he said. "I hope we can work together to pursue what is best for the safety and well-being of both students and staff in Spotsylvania Schools."

In a follow-up email to the School Board, Blosser asked for "a full review of the policy" to include "a full review of the past and present use of restraint and seclusion in our schools."

He stressed that he does not believe there is any intent on the part of school personnel to harm students, but said, "We could be harming students even if no one intends to harm them."

Blosser said that since his April 11 comments, Acting Superintendent Carol Flenard told him via email that Richardson had pulled the division's restraint and seclusion policy "to complete a full review."

He said he won't stop advocating for change on behalf of his son and all special education students.

"[Restraint] takes a difficult situation and never makes it better," Blosser said. "If you use it, it will make the situation worse. It will eliminate the threat, but that should be the only time you use it."

Adele Uphaus–Conner:
540/735-1973
auphaus@freelancestar.com
@flsadele

COVID AID HELPED KEEP KIDS FED

Concerns grow as end to nutrition waivers looms

Elijah Escobar eats breakfast at Bowling Green Elementary. Pandemic-era waivers allowed schools to feed all kids for free.

BY ADELE UPHAUS-CONNER
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Last summer, the Fredericksburg Regional Food Bank served 32,000 meals to area children.

That's more than three times as many meals as were served during the summer in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Carey Sealy, director of programs for the regional food bank, said the exponential growth was made possible by waivers put in place by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Services as a result of the pandemic.

The waivers allow schools and summer feeding programs greater flexibility to plan and distribute meals. They allow schools to feed all children for free, regardless of income, and have done away with much of the red tape that can prevent families from accessing school meals.

Those waivers are set to expire June 30.

Congress last month passed a $1.5 trillion omnibus spending bill that failed to include authorization to extend the waivers beyond June, and the sudden end has local school nutrition and

SEE WAIVERS, A10

WATCH: To hear Bowling Green Elementary Principal Cindy Heckstall talk about the impact of the federal nutrition waivers at her school, point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link.

WAIVERS

▶ FROM A1

summer feeding programs wondering how they will continue providing meals.

"I know not everybody will understand, but at the same time, it's just really important that every kid has the ability to have nutritious food," Sealy said.

The child nutrition waivers were put in place in March 2020 as part of the first COVID-19 aid package.

Last summer, the food bank used waivers permitting non-congregate—or "grab and go"—meal service, allowing meals to be served outside of traditional times and allowing parents and guardians to pick up meals on behalf of their children to expand the reach and impact of its summer feeding program.

Under the pre-pandemic model, parents had to bring children to a group site within a certain time period to sit and eat the meal.

Sealy said the changes enabled by the waivers made it easier for working parents to participate.

"I feel like grab-and-go and pickup is so much more convenient and there is a lot less stigma," she said. "[Under the old model] you're requiring the parents to do a lot to make sure their child has lunch when you're bringing them to a site, sitting with them to eat and then taking them home."

Without the waivers, Sealy said three summer feeding sites will have to close, and there could be as much as a 42 percent decline in participation.

The Salem Church Library site, which Sealy said has been "a tried-and-true feeding site" for many years, would have to close because it no longer has the volunteer pool to operate a group meal site.

"Volunteers are needed to receive the children, count the meals, occupy the children, plan and lead activities—it takes a big volunteer pool," Sealy said.

The child nutrition waivers also suspend the area eligibility requirement—by which sites that provide free meals must be located in school districts where at least 50 percent of the population qualifies for free lunch—and the income eligibility requirement.

Two more of the food bank's summer feeding sites—the Caroline County YMCA and Eastland United Methodist Church in Spotsylvania County—would have to close without those waivers, Sealy said.

Local school divisions have used the waivers—in particular, the waiver to allow the Seamless Summer Option during the school year—to provide free breakfast and lunch to all children since spring 2020.

"Not only are we feeding everyone for free, but we get reimbursed for everything," said Keith Conner, supervisor of nutrition service for Caroline Public Schools. "Under [the Seamless Summer Option], we are reimbursed for 100 percent for every meal we serve at the higher summer feeding program rate that is usually used for non-school entities."

Conner said the higher reimbursement rate has helped to counteract the effect of inflation and supply chain disruptions.

"Some supplies have doubled in cost," he said. "There have been dramatic price increases in food—sometimes 25 percent increases. So that additional funding went a long way."

Another of the national waivers that is set to expire permits flexibility in USDA nutrition requirements for whole grains and unflavored milk.

Conner said that due to supply chain disruptions, products that meet those requirements are often unavailable.

"We're still dealing with [disruption] in almost every order," he said. "Sometimes 10 to 20 percent of the order is not in stock. The waivers gave us flexibility to bring in similar products of similar quality.

"Come July 1, from what we understand, those flexibilities are gone out the window," Conner continued. "That's going to create some challenges. It's unfortunate that they've decided that magically on July 1, [supply chain disruptions] are going away, because we know we'll be dealing with these issues for months, if not a year to come."

Brian Kiernan, food services director for Fredericksburg City Public Schools, said that failure to extend the waiver allowing non-congregate meal service will drastically affect his ability to serve summer meals to the city's children.

This summer, Kiernan said, FCPS will have four mobile food trucks prepared to hit the city's roads every day. Of the 35–40 stops on the trucks' routes, at least half are apartment complexes and only a small handful of those have a centralized, sheltered area where kids can sit to eat.

If the waiver permitting non-congregate meal service is not renewed, the trucks will only be able to stop at a few locations.

"The reality is, our kids come down to the truck, get a meal and go back to their apartments to eat it," Kiernan said. "Oftentimes, the parents aren't home. So what do we do [if the waiver is not renewed]? We have four trucks ready to go out every day, but now we're going out and there will be kids we can't feed because there's not a central location for them to eat.

"We designed our mobile program because kids can't get to these centralized locations to eat," Kiernan continued. "This directly stabs our mobile program in the back."

Earlier this year, U.S. Rep. Abigail Spanberger, D–7th District, introduced a bill that she is co-sponsoring with one Democrat and two Republican representatives. The Keeping School Meals Flexible Act would extend the USDA's authority to renew the child nutrition waivers through June 30, 2023.

Extending the waivers would cost about $11 billion, Spanberger's office estimated.

In an April 12 discussion with school and community meal providers sponsored by No Kid Hungry Virginia, Spanberger said feeding children is "not a partisan issue."

"These waivers are vital to schools across Virginia," she said. "In the early days of the pandemic, Congress reacted quickly. Two years later, we're in a different place, but still in a challenged position, and new challenges still necessitate these waivers. How can we we ensure that the school nutrition workforce is able to meet their duties and responsibilities?"

Spanberger said 52 senators have expressed support for a similar bill introduced by Michigan Democratic Senator Debbie Stabenow.

Adele Uphaus–Conner: 540/735-1973
auphaus@freelancestar.com
@flsadele