

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF OPERATING ENGINEERS LOCAL 963

NEWS RELEASE

April 10, 2025

Operating Engineers Union calls for Vancouver School Board and City of Vancouver to restore cut to school food program by \$320,000 and rescind removing VSB as Living Wage employer; says cutting extensive VSB management growth could pay for food program and lowest paid workers

VANCOUVER – A key Vancouver School Board union is calling on the City of Vancouver and VSB to restore a planned \$320,000 cut to school food programs that feed hungry students and to rescind a plan to remove the VSB's status as a Living Wage employer.

The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 963 says the cut in the annual City school food program grant will reduce the number of hungry students fed in schools while rescinding the Vancouver School Board's Living Wage BC Employer status means immediate and significant cuts to the wages of hundreds of contracted VSB workers.

And IUOE Local 963 says that VSB could easily remain a Living Wage BC employer if it simply cut back on the massive growth of high-priced VSB staff over the past 10 years.

"This is a set of outrageous moves by both the City of Vancouver and the Vancouver School Board – the City is taking food off the plates of hungry students and the VSB is making cuts to the wages of the lowest paid workers it employs – while the number over management making over \$150,000 per year grows astronomically," says IUOE Local 963 Business Manager Tim De Vivo. "We're calling on the City and VSB to immediately halt these unfair cuts to those least able to afford them."

IUOE Local 963 represents about 850 workers at VSB, including building engineers, custodians, cafeteria and food service workers, Red Seal chefs, TQ bakers, supervision aides and other workers.

De Vivo says that the City's announcement it will cut an annual grant of \$320,000 made to the VSB since 2014 to help fund the school food program serving thousands of hungry students down to \$162,500 in 2025 and end it entirely in 2026 is both short-sighted and hard-hearted, given the needs.

And De Vivo adds that the Vancouver School Board has cut the wages of workers contracted to provide services to VSB to below Living Wage BC's Metro Vancouver wage of \$27.05 per hour, with about 200 school bus drivers and attendants for students with disabilities being told by email on Friday April 4 that their wages would drop to \$23.40 and \$19.65 per hour respectively effective Monday April 7, putting them below the amount Living Wage BC estimates is needed to live in Metro Vancouver above poverty levels. Other contracted workers are also affected, including at seven privately contracted school cafeterias and other as yet undetermined VSB contractors' workers.

De Vivo says the City has stated it is cutting the school food program grant because the federal government has promised new school food program funding to the provincial government, but De Vivo says the need remains great and that the federal funding was never intended to replace the City's grant, nor is it guaranteed to continue beyond the current three-year agreement with the province.

"This is an attempt by the City to spend money it committed to feeding hungry students on some other less important City goals – is it to promote Bitcoin or other non-core needs? Who knows but these kids should come first, not last," De Vivo said.

The IUOE Local 963 is also calling on the Vancouver School Board to rescind a plan to end its status as a Living Wage employer by cutting wages for the lowest paid employees and contracted employees and says it instead should cut the VSB's extensive and expensive growth of VSB management ranks, which could easily cover the costs of paying a Living Wage to all its workers.

De Vivo notes that the VSB budget for "District Administration" has grown from \$14.75 million in 2014 to \$27.69 million in 2024-2025 – an increase of 87.7% - while during that same time period, enrolment in Vancouver schools has remained steady at about 52,000 students both in 2024 and 2014. Inflation during that same time period was about 31%.

And De Vivo says an analysis of VSB management wages shows that there are at least 112 senior excluded staff making over \$150,000 per year – a number that grows annually.

"There is no justification for cutting the City's school food program grant in a time of great need and economic instability and that cutting VSB's lowest paid workers' wages to below the Living Wage line is unconscionable given the significant growth in the cost of highly paid managers at VSB," De Vivo said. "The wage cuts to the lowest paid workers should be rescinded immediately and the Living Wage BC standard restored."