

Voces de la Frontera: MPS students, allies will unveil “School Lunch Justice” campaign Thursday, prepare to join 2-day general strike

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(MILWAUKEE, WI) – Earlier this afternoon, Youth Empowered in the Struggle (YES) students unveiled their six demands for “School Lunch Justice” for MPS in anticipation of budget discussions beginning in April. At a press conference in front of MPS Central Offices, the group of multi-racial working class students listed their demands for the MPS school board and administration, including food cooked fresh in their schools, more options, accommodations and consideration for our religious students, larger portions, higher wages for cafeteria workers, and regular meetings with the board and administration to discuss and decide these issues.

Media toolkit:

- Facebook Livestream video is available [here](#).
- Photos, additional video, full student testimonies and more are available in our [press toolkit here](#).
- Photos of students printing original protest signs and t-shirts worn by students at the press conference are available [here](#) (credit Joe Brusky/MTEA).

Students are demanding that members of the school board schedule a meeting with them to discuss their six “School Lunch Justice” demands, and that members of the public [sign on to their petition in support](#).

This event took place nearly one month before YES students plan to join Voces de la Frontera members and allies in a two-day “Day Without Latinxs and Immigrants”

general strike planned for Sunday, May 1 and Monday, May 2. May Day is a day to uplift the demands of working class families, and MPS students plan to unite with immigrant essential workers, families and allies to highlight their “School Lunch Justice” campaign and to urge the Biden administration, Senator Ron Johnson and Wisconsin Republicans to take action to protect immigrant essential workers and families and stop blocking immigration reform, driver licenses for all and in-state tuition equity.

Katherine Villanueva, YES member and senior at the Milwaukee School of Languages, said, “YES believes every student in Milwaukee deserves to have access to nutritious, delicious, culturally appropriate foods in school so that they are better able to learn. Youth Empowered in the Struggle surveyed over one thousand students across Milwaukee Public Schools and identified that the poor quality of school lunch is the most pressing issue that must be addressed to improve our school environment. Our lunches are cooked in a central location and distributed to the schools to be reheated, resulting in undercooked food and of substandard quality. This is not acceptable!”

Doricela Herrera, YES member and freshman at the Milwaukee School of Languages, said, “I should be able to have fresh and stable food, and to have a healthy meal every single day. This shouldn’t be a problem at all. Why do we have to eat reheated food instead of freshly made food? Some families might not have enough to provide for their kids and rely on the school lunches, but their kids have to eat the unfresh reheated food.”

William Pickard, YES member and freshman at Hamilton High School, said, “We want to increase the options of the hot and cold lunch. Some ideas include having a salad and potato bar for kids to make their own meals. More available options for kids to choose from and having a cold lunch that isn’t just a peanut butter and jelly sandwich would be great. But the few options we have now leaves kids not eating then staying hungry throughout the day—making them less attentive, tired, and irritable leading to a worse education. And a group of unhappy students.”

Mandeeq Abdulahi, YES member and junior at Riverside High School, said, “We demand that MPS put a system in place that identifies and accommodates students’ personal, religious, and medical dietary needs. As a fellow Muslim I have seen other Muslim students simply not eat school lunch because there’s no option for them to. They get to see their other classmates enjoy their school lunch while

they are hungry.”

Zoe Smith, YES member and sophomore at Reagan High School, said, “We demand that MPS hire more lunch staff to cook the food and increase their wages. We cannot learn if we are hungry. We need to be fed, but our staff needs to pay their bills and provide for their families. This demand needs to be treated with equity and no shortcuts. Because no one deserves shortcuts taken at their expense. We also demand that the board establish regular meetings with YES to ensure these demands are met and implemented with student voices at the table. Student voices need to be heard, and having a voice at the table is not only important, but essential for other student issues in the future. We are capable. We know what’s at stake. But none of that matters if we aren’t heard.”

Christine Neumann-Ortiz, Executive Director of Voces de la Frontera, said, “This year, members of Voces de la Frontera and Youth Empowered in the Struggle voted to organize a 2-day general strike to ensure that our economic contribution is felt by politicians and corporations that take our humanity and labor for granted. On May 1, we will hold a mass march in Milwaukee and on May 2 we will hold a statewide lobby day at the state Capitol in Madison. Through our strength we have defended our community well. We have a proud history. We have made a difference and we are stronger than ever. Join us!”