



## Group organizes free meals for Randolph youngsters

By Submitted by Jesse Gordon, Randolph Foundation for Education cofounder

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“This autumn, kids and teens eat free, with no enrollment necessary,” at every public school in Randolph.

That’s the goal of the Randolph Foundation for Education’s Charter Petition which recently was certified.

That’s also the goal for the summer program at the Turner Library, where kids and teens can simply show up and get a free breakfast mornings at 9 a.m. and free lunch at noon.

“The important aspect for the summer meals program is that there’s no enrollment required, and we want to extend that same idea into the school year,” said Jesse Gordon, co-founder of the Randolph Foundation for Education. “The RFE has submitted our ‘Community Eligibility Option’ petition which requires the school committee to hold a hearing on this topic within the next couple of months. We encourage attendance by parents who experienced the Turner Library no-enrollment meals program, and we will encourage the school administration to adopt the no-enrollment meals program permanently during the school year.”

The existing means program in the Randolph schools requires that parents individually enroll each student, providing identification and income information. When that information is not provided, the school system still provides meals to the kids but does not get funded. In other words, the enrollment requirement creates a funding deficit, which runs into many thousands of dollars per year.

“A lot of immigrant families might not return the forms telling the federal government their income and Social Security number because they do not want the government looking into their status,” said Yahaira Lopez, an RFE board member and special education advocate. “I’ve heard figures over \$40,000 per year, which can accumulate over time so that the total deficit could be over \$100,000 if parent fees are not paid to date. This petition will allow the district and town to publicly address this subject with parents and residents of Randolph to be informed regarding current deficit and what is the district’s plan moving forward.”

One of the purposes of the hearing called for by the RFE petition is to clarify the dollar amount of the student meal deficit.

“The previous school superintendent told the RFE about this deficit, and we committed to trying to fill the budget gap,” Gordon said. “But he estimated the budget gap at \$4,000 to \$5,000 per year. Now I hear figures from \$20,000 to \$50,000 per year, which we can’t possibly fund-raise. Hence the ‘Community Eligibility Option’ to get rid of the budget gap for the future.”

The United States Department of Agriculture would pay for the program, Gordon stated.

Allaphia Sackeena Richards, Randolph community activist and RFE board member, said the organization still will try to fill the student meal budget gap.

“You can help by attending our Delroy Fund Gala,” Richards said.

The gala dinner will be held at 5 p.m. Aug. 11 at the Elks Lodge, 21 School St., Randolph. Tickets are \$50, with senior discounts available.

“The Randolph community supports more funding for our public schools, and while we will work to help, we want our elected officials to step up and work to increase funding also,” Richards said.

On the Charter Petition, the Randolph Town Charter, section 7.6, allows for citizens to petition the school committee or town council for a hearing, by gathering signatures from 150 registered voters.

“We’re the first organization to take advantage of Charter Petitions in the history of Randolph,” Gordon said. “We plan more petitions and we hope this Charter Petition opens a new voice for the citizens of Randolph, a new means to be heard by our elected officials in a deeper way on difficult subjects.”

Gordon plans to mail an invitation to the Delroy Fund Gala for each citizen who signed the petition but notes that every person in Randolph can attend.

Tickets can be purchased online at <http://RandolphFoundation.org>; checks can be mailed to the Randolph Foundation for Education at P.O. Box 530, Randolph MA, 02368. Tickets can also be purchased at the door from 5-6 p.m. Aug. 11 at the Elks Lodge.