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Public Comments by Eliana Rougle

Good Afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak about something very important to me, our school, and our community.

Making ACPS schools greener, specifically focusing on styrofoam and plastic in our cafeterias, is a mission I have great passion for. Everyone knows that plastic and styrofoam are bad for the environment, and that you should recycle. If you are environmentally conscious, you probably try to recycle as much as you can, and try to go for the greener option. But have you ever thought about all the waste produced at your own schools? The very schools we are always trying to improve are producing an incredible amount of waste every year. My passion for this led me to start a petition from which I gained the support of 376 students and teachers from Hammond. It appeared to me that this issue was important to my peers.

According to the idashboard for ACPS, there are 16,062 students enrolled this year. If just half of our students, and I am sure there are more, take lunches, that's 8,031 non-recyclable, non-biodegradable trays being thrown away every day. Add in food, plastic, and paper waste, and the amount of waste produced every day is even more. With that many students in the district, you can only imagine how much is spent and wasted on lunch, trays, and utensils every day. With all that waste, it is hard to fathom why we continue our ways without any hesitation.

Not only are these trays and utensils wasteful, they have very negative effects. Styrene, a chemical present in styrofoam has been linked to cancer and nerve damage. The CDC has found that it is not present in most people, and small amounts haven't been found to be harmful, but our students are being exposed to these chemicals almost every time they have school lunch. This chemical can also enter our air. In Alexandria, we incinerate our garbage, and although I am sure that the workers are good at cleaning and keeping things safe, the risk is still there. All of these risks can be reduced if we switch to reusable or biodegradable trays.

Plastic is known to be bad for our environment. It's all over landfills, it covers oceans, and harms animals. What some don't know is that it is also bad for our health. Plastic is found in nearly everyone's body. Although this has not proven to be an immediate threat, it is a cause for some concern. Plastic can be recycled, but there is a limit to this. We can solve part of the problem in our schools by replacing plastic utensils with reusable ones.

Although my main focus tonight is plastic and styrofoam, I feel it is important to mention a few more things ACPS should consider if we truly want to become greener. One of those things is recycling. Everyone knows what it is, you learn the three r's in elementary school, but after that, not much more emphasis is put on it. Most people don't know what they can and can't recycle and even if they did, recycling bins are not present in the cafeteria or in most classrooms, at least in my school, FC Hammond. Education on the three r's, and recycling bins in every classroom could help a lot. Finally, food waste. Food waste is the number one type of waste in schools. When I went to Polk, I learned about composting, and every year we would have a couple months where we put some of our food scraps in a special brown bin. Once students got into the habit of this, we didn't even think twice, and it just became normal. I believe that starting some sort of composting program similar to this in our schools would be a great opportunity for students to learn, and for ACPS schools to reduce their waste. We could use that compost for gardening clubs. I know that my school courtyard isn't used much and that there are students interested in cleaning it up. Gardening and clean-up groups could be formed and the compost would be put to great use.

Thank you for your time this evening. I hope you will take what I said into consideration. Remember, we can be part of the solution, not a part of the pollution.

Sources

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