

**Student Testimony before the
New York City Council Committee on Finance**

In support of Universal Free School Lunch

**Executive Budget Hearing
June 6, 2014**



Testimony of Nafestia Caleb

Good afternoon. My name is Nafestia Caleb. I am 16 years old. I go to Brooklyn School for Math and Research which is part of the Bushwick campus. I'm here to represent the Lunch 4 Learning campaign and the Youth Food Council. I am here to talk about universal free school lunch for all students.

We live in a city where choices are made for students based on their family income. Not only are choices made, but students get judged for how much money their family makes. Where I go to school there are kids who are eligible for free or reduced lunch and others who pay for their lunch. I've noticed that the kids who are eligible for free or reduced lunch get bullied because other students consider them to be poor. Some kids don't care, but many kids stop eating because they don't want to be seen as a kid who gets free lunch. 75% of New York City public school students come from families that make less than \$36,000 a year, making them eligible for free school meals. For the other 25%, they have to pay for school lunch, but what happens when their parents can't or don't give them money for lunch? This means that they can go a whole day without eating which affects how they conduct themselves in class, how much they can pay attention, and how they learn. As you can see because these students don't eat they're too focused on how hungry they are than on what is going on in class. If lunch becomes universal it would lead to less empty stomachs and more full minds.

Food is a basic right. Everyone, especially students, needs food to focus, learn and grow. All students should have access to food and this should not depend on what their parents' income is. Mayor de Blasio, I hope you will support the minds and health of all students and include universal free school lunch in the budget.

Testimony of Aminata Abdouramane

Hello, my name is Aminata Abdouramane and I am a student at Academy for Urban Planning. I want to express my support for the Lunch 4 Learning Campaign for universal free school lunch for all NYC public school students.

Bullying, name calling, threatening, oppressing and the oppressed. The lunch food and those who receive it are the leading causes of bullying at my school. In most schools, kids often get bullied because they eat the food which, state-wide, is nicknamed "free-free." This name is uncomfortable to most. Just last week, I witnessed a boy getting bullied over getting in line for "free-free." The bully was yelling over the entire cafeteria, "You got free free. Yo!" This causes depression, feeling left out, and encourages students not eat the lunch even if it is their only meal of the day. More often than not, the lunch food is the thing that determined who gets bullied or not. There are many issues with the school lunch including the portion size, freshness, undercooked food and not enough fresh fruits and veggies. However, I believe that one important first step we can make is to make all school lunches universally free and get rid of the bullying and teasing that happens because of it. I am asking you Mr. Mayor to make universal free lunch a priority. We need to stop the stigma and get better food in our schools. Thank you for your time and your support for this important issue.

Testimony of Angel Velasco

My name is Angel Velasco. I am a student at BSSJ. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am here to speak about the Lunch 4 Learning campaign for universal free and healthy school lunch for all NYC public school students.

The lunch at my school is bad because the food is never hot, the food is very greasy, and it's not healthy. I think we need to change the food in my cafeteria through universal free lunch so students can eat without having to pay. I plan on going to college and becoming an immigration lawyer. But college is expensive and my family is trying to save, and we cannot afford the 35 dollars a month for the school lunch. Luckily, I don't have to pay for lunch but there are many families not much different than mine who do.

I don't like the food at my school and it does not support the people and affects their health badly. The students don't eat, and their grades are bad because of it. This also affect the self and body. I am an American. I am against the discrimination against poor people. America has a lot of food, not one should be hungry. This is my testimony. I want to change the lives of the students of New York City through free lunch for all.

Mayor de Blasio I ask you to provide food for all students through universal free school lunch. As an American immigrant, food is a basic need and as our mayor you have the power to say yes or no to students.