

Public Hearing on the 2015-16 City Budget

March 25th, 2015

Remarks of Diamond Rivera
BRIDGES Afterschool Program
Union Settlement Association

Good afternoon everybody, my name is Diamond Rivera. I go to Isaac Newton Middle School and am in eighth grade. I'm in the Lunch4Learning program after school, where we have been working to make school lunch more satisfying and valuable to students at our school.

Not many students at our school or other New York City schools eat the school lunch and that has a serious impact on our schoolwork. At my school, only 50% of students eat the school lunch more than twice a week. This is sad because not many kids are fortunate enough to be able to bring a nutritious meal from home. When we talked to Isaac Newton students, 95% said making school lunch free would be fair and a good idea. However, many students are still afraid of being teased if they take the school lunch.

It's great that school lunch is now free for all middle school students, but not fair that it isn't for elementary or high schoolers. I will be in high school next year and want to have a healthy, affordable lunch to get me through the day. If we make school lunch universally free, more students will eat it. If we improve how the food tastes, more students will eat it. And if more students eat it, then we can remove the stigma that only poor students eat the school lunch. That is why it's important to us to make these changes.

Yesterday, I was in class and after morning announcements about school lunch I overheard my friend say, "You should eat school lunch since its free, it's better than spending your money on junk." Then, at luch I saw people I never see eat school lunch, get lunch and eat it.

We hope you will support our campaign by making school lunch universally free by putting money to the city budget. Thank you.

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Remarks of Sarah Pabon
BRIDGES Afterschool Program
Union Settlement Association

Hello, my name is Sarah Pabon and I am a student at Isaac Newton Middle School. This past year, I have worked as part of the Lunch4Learning campaign, talking with other students at our school about their feelings towards school lunch.

The majority of the students at my school dislike the school lunch. Honestly, I don't eat the food because I don't believe it is healthy, well cooked, or has flavor, and know that many of my peers agree. When we spoke to and surveyed the high schoolers in our building, they did not want to pay for food that they didn't enjoy or feel was healthy. It's hard to go through the day without any energy, but still I don't think the food is healthy or good enough to eat.

As I graduate to high school, I really want the food to be changed to be both healthy and free. I do not want my family to have to pay for food that will not give me the energy I need to get through the day.

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March 25th, 2015

Remarks of Ciarra Lawson
BRIDGES Afterschool Program
Union Settlement Association

Hello ladies and gentlemen. My name is Ciarra Lawson and I attend Isaac Newton Middle School. I am a member of Lunch4Learning at my school, and work with other students to discuss what we'd like to see changed about school food. I am here today to talk to you about why my peers and I are asking for universally free school lunch.

We want our voices to be heard in the changes being made to school food. After surveying students in our school, I know that more students will eat school lunch every day if we make it free for all and improve the food that is offered. Right now, the food at my school is not cooked well, is often frozen, and is bland. It is a problem if the school food is bad because then students don't eat lunch. If students don't eat the food, they can't concentrate in class. This is also a problem because if students don't have food at home, school is the only place where they are able to eat lunch. However, since the school lunch doesn't taste well, those students who don't eat at home don't eat at all. This is important because students have to have a meal during the day.

Thank you for hearing what I have to say, and I hope that you can help us to change the situations for school food. Thank you for your time.

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Remarks of Briana Latchman
BRIDGES Afterschool Program
Union Settlement Association

Hello, my name is Briana Latchman. I am currently in the BRIDGES program and am working with Lunch4Learning. I am giving this speech because school lunch is important to my peers and me. We are working now to improve school lunch and ask that it be universally free because we will be high schoolers next year. The other BRIDGES students and I have worked very hard this past year to identify how we could get make school lunch better.

This year, we worked to survey students from our school on how they feel about the school lunch and if they knew it was free. One thing that I found interesting was that more students this year are eating lunch, compared to only 39% of students we talked to last year. We need to make sure that these students continue to eat school lunch by expanding the free school lunch program to elementary and high schools.

Part of the issue is that some families don't want to share financial information, and so they couldn't qualify for the free school lunch program. If school lunch was universally free – as it is for middle schools now – we could get more students to eat. I also hope that we can change the school lunch to include better ingredients and more foods students like. This would also encourage more students to eat school lunch and not be hungry during the school day.

I hope you will support our plan and include the money to make school lunch universally free. Thank you for listening.

Public Hearing on the 2015-16 City Budget
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Remarks of Alejandra Villarreal
BRIDGES Afterschool Program
Union Settlement Association

Hello, my name is Alejandra and I study at Isaac Newton Middle School. I am here today because I think it is important that my voice be heard about the need to change school lunch.

I am in eighth grade now and will be going to high school next year. I don't think it is fair that students in high school have to pay for the food they need to get through the day, especially when this food is so poorly made and doesn't taste good.

I want to do well and enjoy my lunch when I am in high school and so am here to ask you to expand universal free school lunch to high schools and elementary schools.

Public Hearing on the 2015-16 City Budget
March 25th, 2015

Remarks of Abigail Obeng
BRIDGES Afterschool Program
Union Settlement Association

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Abigail Obeng. I am a student at Isaac Newton Middle School, where I participate in Lunch4Learning after school. We're here today to talk to you about the need for universal free school lunch. For the past few months, we've been working to make lunch better, learning about healthy recipes, surveying students, and talking to higher authorities about what can be done to ensure more students eat school lunch.

To me, the school lunch is good. I eat the lunch because I need to feed my brain and get energy for the rest of my day. However, over 50% of the students at my school skip lunch. They are part of the hundreds of thousands of New York City students who do not eat lunch on a daily basis, although over 25% qualified for free lunch last year. This is because students think the lunch is unappealing and not cool to eat – something that they may continue to think going into high school.

It is important that we make school lunch universally free for all elementary, middle, and high school students so that more students will eat it. If more students take lunch, then we can prevent food waste, improve the food, and prevent the stigmatization of mostly low-income students eating the school lunch. If we change these things about school food, everyone will eat it and no one will go through the school day hungry or being bullied.

We hope you can support our Lunch4Learning campaign by expanding free school lunch to all New York City public schools. Thank you.

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Remarks of Ariyana Jenkins
BRIDGES Afterschool Program
Union Settlement Association

Good afternoon, my name is Ariyana Jenkins and I am in 8th grade at Isaac Newton Middle School. I'm a member of Lunch4Learning and have been working to understand why students do or do not eat school lunch. We are here to present because we want free school lunch for all and bring a change to school lunch so that more students will eat.

I recently found out that only 50% of the New York City children that are eligible for free or reduced price lunch actually eat it. This is upsetting but I am not surprised. When the BRIDGES participants talked to our peers, many didn't eat school lunch because they believed it wasn't appetizing or that it wasn't cool to eat it. Many still thought that middle school students had to pay for it and so spent the day hungry instead.

I think that by making school lunch free for everyone we can fix this problem. If we also work to improve the school lunch – adding seasoning and variety to the food – more students would eat it and school lunch wouldn't be considered “uncool” anymore.

Today, we're asking you to continue to support our efforts and the Lunch4Learning campaign to make school lunch free for all New York City public school students.

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Remarks of Brandon Mangual
BRIDGES Afterschool Program
Union Settlement Association

Hello, good evening. My name is Brandon Mangual and I am a student at Isaac Newton Middle School and currently in eighth grade. I am also a participant of Lunch4Learning, and am here today on behalf of my peers to fight for universal free school lunch. School lunch is important to me because it helps fuel the body and feed the brain. We need to make school lunch better and universally free for all NYC students. This is especially important for many students at my school or who are above income eligibility for free or reduced price lunch.

One in every four NYC children lives in a home that lacks enough food. Many of these students don't participate in the federally funded school lunch programs at their public schools due to the programs' poverty stigma. Some students think that only those that can't afford to bring lunch from home eat the school lunch, because it doesn't have a good flavor or an appetizing appearance. If we make the school lunch more appealing, then more students will get meals in the cafeteria. If everyone is getting school lunch, then we can remove the poverty stigma and reduce bullying in the cafeteria.

I hope we can change both of these aspects of school lunch, so that more students will eat it. If more students eat, then we can challenge the stigma surrounding school lunch. We can fight the stigma by making school lunch free for all NYC students. Please help support our work towards improving the school lunch experience and support free and healthy school lunch for all NYC public school students.