



Campaign Key Points

What is the goal of the campaign?

Universal free and healthy school lunch for **all** 1.1 million NYC public school students is the most effective way to encourage greater participation by eliminating the poverty stigma associated with the program.

Who makes up the coalition?

A broad range of over 190 organizations and elected leaders have joined the campaign.

Why do we want universal free school meals for all NYC public school students?

Participation in the school lunch program is low—but the need is great:

- 68% of NYC public school students are eligible for free school lunch, with annual family income less than \$26,000 for family of three.
- 75% are eligible for free or reduced school lunch, with annual family income less than \$37,000 for family of three.
- Many students whose families are above the \$37,000 income cap are often struggling to meet basic needs.

Changing the current system – which now links school food with family income – will get rid of the income stigma that greatly impacts participation, especially as children get older:

- School lunch participation is 81% in elementary school and drops to 61% in middle school and 38% in high school.
- **250,000 of the 780,000 students who are eligible for free or reduced priced meals do not participate.**

Universal School Meals Works

- NYC schools that provide free school lunch to all students through federal incentive programs called “Provision 2” and the “Community Eligibility Provision” (CEP) demonstrate significant increases in the number of students eating, especially in middle and high schools. This proves true in other places that have universal free school lunch.
- In September 2014, the Department of Education implemented universal free school lunch in middle schools as part of the city’s focus on improving the middle school educational environment. As a result, an average of 7,500 additional students ate lunch each day—an increase of 1,322,000 additional meals served throughout the 2014-2015 school year. The City also gained \$6.9 million in federal reimbursements under the Community Eligibility Provision.

Future steps

Using lessons learned from the middle school experience, the city should expand universal lunch to all public schools by implementing federal incentive programs (Community Eligibility Provision) that maximize federal reimbursements and reduce paperwork.

- *Over time, we project a 20% increase in participation or an additional 120,000 students eating school lunch each day with full expansion.*

Cost & Revenue Generation: School lunch costs are primarily paid for by the federal and state governments. A 20% increase in participation would bring an additional \$59 million in federal and state funds into NYC. Historically, any difference between the reimbursement and the cost of providing the meal is covered by city funds. A 20% increase in participation may require at most an additional \$20 million in NYC funds, or \$20 per student per year. **If CEP is implemented for all students the federal reimbursement will be higher and the cost to the city significantly less.**

This \$20 million represents .0001% of the \$26 billion NYC Department of Education budget. This is a small investment with a big return.

Universal free school lunch is WIN-WIN-WIN! It benefits students and families, schools, and the local economy.

- Students will be better nourished and ready to learn.
- Families are better able to make ends meet.
- A 20% increase in participation can create 1,000 SchoolFood jobs and increase local economic activity.
- Schools can direct time and resources toward educational activities that are now used for the collection of school food application forms and the daily identification of students.