



November 30, 2018

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

As statewide and national organizations working to end childhood hunger in New York, we are committed to increasing the availability of, access to, and participation in the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs offered in public schools across the State. We thank you for your vision and leadership in establishing the “No Student Goes Hungry” initiative in New York. The passage of these proposals in the budget established New York as a leader in ensuring access to healthy school meals by enacting one of the strongest child hunger measures in the nation. We believe that there is an opportunity to build on these successes by eliminating the student contribution for reduced-price lunch and breakfast.

One in five New York children are food insecure, meaning they lack access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Hunger takes a profound toll on children’s health, academic achievement, and ability to reach their full potential. Schools play a central role in safeguarding children from the impact of food insecurity each school day. School breakfasts and lunches serve nearly 500,000 and 1.7 million children respectively in New York’s K-12 schools, providing these students with nutritious food choices. It is important that children have access to healthy food, regardless of their ability to pay, since school meals are often the only dependable source of nutritious food for food-insecure children.

The State could further increase participation in the school meal programs by eliminating the 25-cent reduced-price copayment for school meals. This co-payment can be a significant barrier to participation for many working-class low-income families (between 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty level). Participation among students certified for reduced-price school meals traditionally has lagged that of students certified for free meals, due primarily to the per meal fee. Seven states—Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington—and the District of Columbia provide funding to eliminate the reduced-price fee for breakfast, and have seen an increase in the number of children participating in the school meal programs as a result.

Currently, New York schools serve 6,817,042 reduced-price lunches and 2,472,041 reduced-price breakfasts, which impact approximately 400,000 kids each day. **This Coalition supports the New York School Nutrition Association's proposal to require the State to provide schools with an additional 25 cents per meal to replace the amount currently paid by the student under the reduced-price meal program. This would cost the State approximately \$2,322,270.** Subsidizing the cost of reduced-price meals would ensure that every student has access to healthy food, irrespective of their family income.

Further, this proposal would complement your anti-shaming initiative by ensuring a child is not embarrassed for paying a quarter for a meal when the student behind him/her is paying \$2.80. Eliminating the reduced category would also help stabilize school food service programs by eliminating the debt owed by reduced-price meal students who have been unable to pay.

The immediate impact of removing the burden of the reduced-price copayment from struggling working families will be measurable – an increase in the number of children eating school meals; reliable access to school meals for children lacking meal funds; and additional funding coming into local schools to support their school meal programs. However, the effects that matter most are these: children who are no longer plagued by hunger and can focus on their lessons; teachers who see improvements in classroom attentiveness and behavior; schools with higher attendance and better academic performance; and struggling families with a safety net that can help lift them out of poverty.

Sincerely,

Food Research and Action Center
Hunger Free America
Hunger Solutions New York
No Kid Hungry New York
New York School Nutrition Association
New York State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy