



UNIVERSAL FREE SCHOOL LUNCH IN NYC: AN OVERVIEW

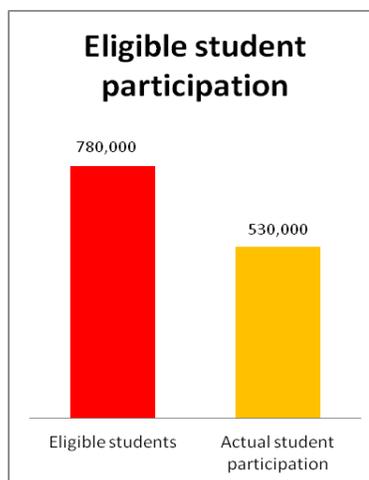
In the 2014-15 school year, NYC is providing free school lunch to public middle school students *regardless of family income*. This is only the beginning: we are working to make sure this important anti-hunger program gets expanded to all NYC public schools soon. By ending the poverty stigma around school lunch and putting all students on equal footing, more students can eat school lunch and benefit from this important meal.

What is universal free school lunch and why is it important?

Through this program, students automatically get free school lunch without having to provide proof of income or other identifying information.

Because many students and their families live at or below the poverty line, there is a strong need for this program in NYC. Currently, 68% of NYC students qualify for free lunch, meaning their families have annual incomes less than \$25,000 for a family of 3. To qualify for reduced-price lunch, annual family incomes must be less than \$36,000. For families whose income is higher than \$36,000, many still struggle to meet basic needs.

Despite this high level of need, 250,000 of the 780,000 students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch do not participate.



Students say they do not eat lunch because of the poverty stigma surrounding school lunch.

According to one student there is:

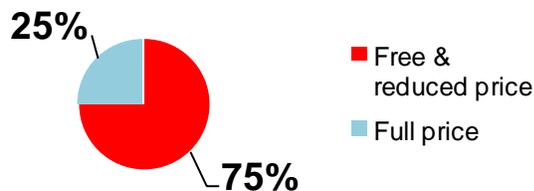
“Bullying, name calling, threatening... eating school lunch is the leading cause of bullying at my school.”

How does it work?

- Students will no longer be identified according to free, reduced, or full-priced categories
- Parents no longer need to fill out a form indicating family income to qualify for lunch
- **HOWEVER**, in order for schools to receive money for teachers and other educational resources under a federal program known as Title I, schools still need parents to fill out a form indicating their family size and income. Previously, this information was collected through the school lunch form. Because the new lunch program no longer requires parents to submit this information, schools must collect it via a new form. *It is very important that parents submit this new form so that their schools can receive additional educational funding*

NYC public school student lunch eligibility

*based on family income





What are the benefits of universal free school lunch?

- Students will be encouraged to eat school lunch without the fear of bullying or harassment
- We anticipate that 20% or 120,000 more students will eat lunch each day
- Students will receive the nutritional benefits of lunch, making them better nourished and able to focus in school
- Parents have one less meal to worry about – especially important for financially-strapped parents
- NYC will benefit from more federal dollars and the creation of more local jobs

Why don't all students in NYC's public schools have free school lunch?

This year free school lunch is being offered only in NYC's stand alone public middle schools (defined as 5-8th, 6-8th, or 7-8th grade schools). Currently the program reaches about 160,000 students in 300 schools.

Universal free school lunch is a critical and far reaching anti-hunger strategy. We are committed to making sure it is successful in middle schools so that it will be expanded to all students in NYC's public schools soon.

Who is working on this?

The Lunch 4 Learning Campaign is a broad, diverse coalition of over 120 organizations working to make free school lunch a reality for all NYC public school students. The Lunch 4 Learning campaign is spearheaded by Community Food Advocates.

More information on the campaign can be found at <http://www.lunch4learningnyc.org>.

How can I get involved?

If you are interested in getting involved – especially if you are an organization, student, or parent – please contact us! There are many ways that you can work on this campaign. And if you have never been involved in a campaign before, we can help!

For more information or to find out how you can get involved, please contact:
Socheatta Meng at smeng@foodadvocates.org or **212-542-9083 ext. 258**