



NEW YORK
**SCHOOL
NUTRITION
ASSOCIATION**

Testimony Prepared for the

**Joint Legislative Hearing on the FY 2019-20 Executive Budget
Education**

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NY School Nutrition Association: Supporting School Nutrition Across New York State

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the FY 2019-20 Joint Legislative Hearings on the education portion of the Executive Budget, as it relates to school funding and state support for students. The New York School Nutrition Association is an organization representing more than 4,200 school employees, managers, and directors. Moreover, we represent many registered dietitians, nutritionists, and industry members, all of whom are committed to ensuring that students have access to healthy meals.

New York schools serve 6,817,042 reduced-price lunches and 2,472,041 reduced-price breakfasts. This impacts approximately 400,000 kids every day.

We have three recommendations that we would like to discuss today.

Eliminate the Student Contribution for Reduced-Price Meals as part of the final FY 2019-20 State Budget

We are requesting that the student contribution for reduced-priced meals be included in the final FY 2019-20 Budget. This would translate into an investment of \$2,322,270 for school food service programs. This policy is warranted for several reasons:

First, by subsidizing the cost of reduced-price meals, at 25 cents per meal, the state could ensure that every student has access to healthy food, regardless of their ability to pay. Good nutrition is at the very center of a child's school success. It enhances their academic performance, improves attendance, and leads to higher graduation rates.

Second, this proposal would also complement the anti-lunch shaming initiative that was passed last year. Children would no longer have to be embarrassed when their peers see them paying a quarter for lunch, exposing the fact that they come from a family with limited means.

Lastly, this state subsidy would guarantee a stable source of funding for reduced-price meals and help to strengthen food service programs by eliminating the debt owed by students who are unable to pay. **Under federal law, school districts must make food service programs whole by taking money from the general fund to cover the debt. This is money that could otherwise be used for educational purposes.**

Support the \$10 Million Dollar Appropriation for the NYS Farm to School Lunch Incentive

Thank you for supporting this program in 2018. It is off to a great start for students, schools, and the farming community.

The \$10 million appropriation supports the Farm to School Lunch Incentive, which is an enhanced meal reimbursement of 25 cents per lunch for every school district that purchases

at least 30% of its total cost of reimbursable lunch food from New York farms, producers, or processors.

Other than this incentive, there hasn't been an increase in the State rate for school food service programs in more than 40 years, and this funding continues to be a critical investment. The program is providing economic opportunities for farmers and New York businesses, while helping students access nutritious, locally grown food.

Include a \$3 Million Dollar Appropriation for Farm to School Grants

Finally, NYSNA requests an increase in funding for the Farm to School Grants Program in the FY 2019-20 enacted State Budget.

The final 2018-19 State Budget provided \$1.5 million for the grants. The \$1.5 million was split evenly between the education and agriculture budgets.

The current Executive Budget contains \$750,000 in the education budget for this purpose. There is no corresponding line item in the agriculture budget. Instead, there is a consolidated funding pot of \$28 million dollars, which is assumed to contain the \$750,000 for the grants.

In FY 2018-19, the Department of Agriculture received \$3.4 million in application requests for the grants.

Since the demand for the funding clearly out ways what is available, we are requesting that the grant program be doubled to \$3 million and that the education and agriculture budget each line out \$1.5 million.

These grants connect farms and schools to support innovative approaches to bringing fresh food to students.

In addition, these grants are a critical complement to the Farm to School Lunch Incentive. Although school districts can't use these grants to directly purchase food, they are using them to set up an infrastructure for the program and buy equipment.

Conclusion

Thank you very much for your attention to these requests. NYSNA looks forward to working with the legislature on these and other proposals affecting schools, students, and student health and nutrition as the budget process unfolds and throughout this session.

