



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

## Hinchey Leads Campaign to Fully Fund Universal School Meals, Guarantee Free Breakfast and Lunch for All NY Students in FY'25 State Budget

MICHELLE HINCHEY January 29, 2024



Too Many NY Students Left Out of Last Year's School Meals Expansion, Hinchey and 285+ Strong Coalition Rally to Close the Gap

**ALBANY, NY** – Today at the State Capitol, Senator Michelle Hinchey led a rally with over 285 advocates from the [Healthy School Meals for All NY Kids Coalition](#) to call for full funding of a Healthy School Meals program that would provide free breakfast and lunch to all students in New York. In last year's State Budget, Hinchey championed a historic expansion of

Healthy School Meals, securing a \$134.6 million statewide investment. As a result, more than 347,000 students in 1,200 schools statewide gained access to free school meals starting this school year. However, hundreds of thousands of students were left out of that expansion, with over 321,000 students in 650 schools still left behind, according to recent state data.

**Senator Michelle Hinchey said,** “Since we expanded Healthy School Meals last year, the transformative progress we expected is unfolding in communities across New York State. More students have gained access to free breakfast and lunch, and with that, we’re actively breaking the stigma of food insecurity, keeping kids healthy, and helping them learn better, all while saving families money every week. We’re also working to connect the dots between school cafeterias and New York farms by making sure the food students are eating is nutritious and locally grown. Every student, family, school, and community in New York should have the opportunity to benefit from School Meals for All, and we won’t stop fighting until we deliver a permanent, universal program.”

“Our educators see it day after day: a child cannot learn when they are hungry, and they cannot leave their hunger at the door when they come to school,” **said Melinda Person, President of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT).** “The focus in a classroom should be on natural curiosity and authentic learning — not basic survival needs. If we want every child in New York to reach their full potential, every child in New York must have access to nutritious meals.”

**Renée St. Jacques, New York Farm Bureau Senior Associate Director of Public Policy and Promotion & Education, said,** “New York Farm Bureau appreciates the inclusion of partial funding of school meals in the Governor’s executive budget proposal, but more funding is needed to ensure that all students in New York can receive free school meals. Schools Meals for All is a true win-win for our school children and farm families. This funding supports the

ability of more schools to partner with farms to provide fresh, local food to students. New York Farm Bureau urges both the Senate and Assembly to support funding of Healthy School Meals for All in the state budget.”

“As someone who received no-cost school meals for the entirety of my K-12 education, I understand how vital these meals are for families across the state,” **said Emily Ledyard, Advocacy Coordinator at Feeding New York State.** “By providing no-cost school meals to all New York children, our state would create welcoming environments for learning, invest in our children's health, and reduce the stigma and bullying that I remember all too well. We cannot let New York children be left behind to cope on their own. We need Healthy School Meals For All!”

Funding Healthy School Meals for All New York students is a critical step in eliminating barriers preventing kids from accessing meals and families from qualifying. Studies show that **one in six** children in New York faces hunger, and one in five students at schools left behind in last year’s school meals investment are considered economically disadvantaged.

Universal access to school meals is key to eradicating social stigmas that hinder student participation; however, when schools offer free meals to all students, participation rises, benefiting everyone. Moreover, Universal School Meals provide significant financial relief, saving families an estimated \$150 per month per child in grocery costs. Beyond individual impact, Healthy School Meals for All enhances schools' buying power and streamlines nutrition program administration. This allows resources to be redirected towards farm-to-school initiatives.

The Healthy School Meals for All Coalition has garnered significant support, with **over 285**

organizations on board. These include a diverse range of advocates, such as labor unions, education associations, parent and teacher groups, as well as organizations dedicated to health, agriculture, and food security.

According to a Siena University poll in November 2023, 77 percent of New York's registered voters are in favor of a state-funded universal school meal program. This support holds strong across different factors like race, age, location, and political beliefs. If implemented statewide, New York would join eight states that have successfully adopted universal school meal programs, including Massachusetts, Vermont, California, Colorado, Maine, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Michigan.

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