

Expanded Free School Meals Through CEP:

An Assessment of the Impacts in New York



New York expanded access to free school meals through state investments that maximize the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). CEP allows high-poverty schools to serve free meals to all students. **New survey findings reveal transformative impacts of this expansion on New York students, families, and schools.**

Hunger Solutions New York surveyed 420 parents and 227 school professionals—including leaders, educators, and food service personnel—in New York schools with and without access to free school meals for all.

Children attending CEP schools are two times less likely to experience food insecurity.

Key findings include:

87% of parents agree that all students, no matter their income, should have access to free meals at school.

82% of parents say free school meals save families money.

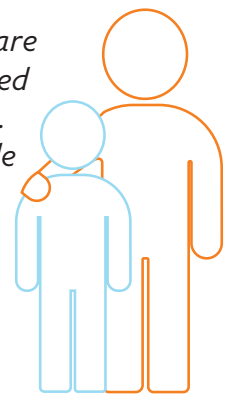
Of parents whose children don't receive free school meals:

44% say their family does not qualify despite struggling to make ends meet.

About a third say their child currently has or has had unpaid meal debt.

"The rising costs of food are harming my ability to feed my child healthy options. Free school meals provide that opportunity."

—Parent



More than 80% of school professionals agree school meals bolster student health and provide a consistent source of nutritious, often locally sourced, ingredients each day.

Over two-thirds of food service personnel in schools offering free meals for all report spending less time collecting meal debt, processing school meal applications, and tracking eligibility.

About half of food service personnel say wages have increased, alongside morale, job opportunities, and professional development, since offering free meals for all students.



"Providing meals at no cost to all students has allowed program operators to focus on improving meal quality and service rather than chasing applications and meal debt. [It] allows us to invest in equipment, local foods, and trained staff to provide healthier, fresher meals."

—School Professional

CEP makes school meal programs more efficient.

Lawmakers must protect and strengthen CEP to ensure New York students are well nourished.

Read more survey findings:

