



AMERICAN DAIRY
ASSOCIATION NORTH
EAST

Redefining Readiness

What our students really need Today!



September 10, 2025





REDEFINING READINESS
*What Our Students Really
Need Today*

Toni Wasi

Youth Nutrition Specialist
American Dairy Association North East





WELCOME

Today's Mission

Explore the key factors contributing to student achievement, empowering you with valuable insights to foster success in students.





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Samyuktha
12th Grade Student
Edison, NJ





Samyuktha



Supporting the Whole Child

Balance and Wellness





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Dr. Michael Prayor

**Brooklyn South Superintendent
Districts: 17, 18, 20, 21, 22 & 33
New York City Public Schools**



MCK Promise: A Call to Compassion

What if kindness
was more than a
gesture?

What if it was a
promise we
made and kept?

The Vision

Authored by Dr. Michael Prayor

Born in schools, now a compass for community

Our communities thrive when moral leadership is lived and shared

The Four Pillars

Compassion:
empathy and grace

Integrity: words
and actions in
alignment with
truth

Responsibility:
owning our impact

Forgiveness:
choosing healing
over harm

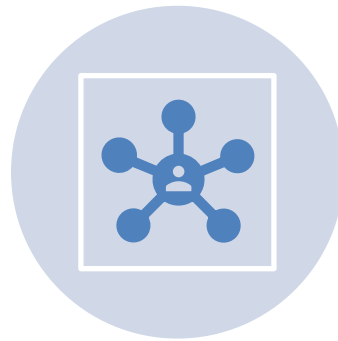
The Bridge of Maslow & Bloom

Maslow before
Bloom: safety, value,
connection first

The MCK Promise is
the bridge between
well-being and
achievement

Without the bridge,
excellence crumbles;
with it, hearts and
minds thrive

The Promise in Action



In schools: circles fostering empathy and problem-solving



In classrooms: integrating pillars into teaching and learning



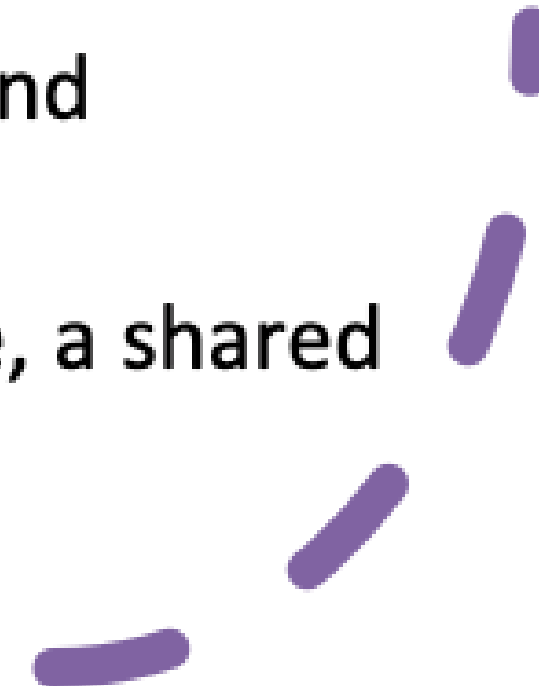
In leadership: trust-building and accountability



In homes: compassion and forgiveness in relationships

A Promise for All

- Students discovering their voice and purpose
- Parents raising children in an evolving world
- Teachers and principals modeling structure and compassion
- Leaders acting with grace and accountability
- Neighbors building unity and belonging
- Not a program – a practice, a shared path forward



A Call to Action

One Word.
One Pillar.
One Promise.

Shaping lives,
not just
lessons

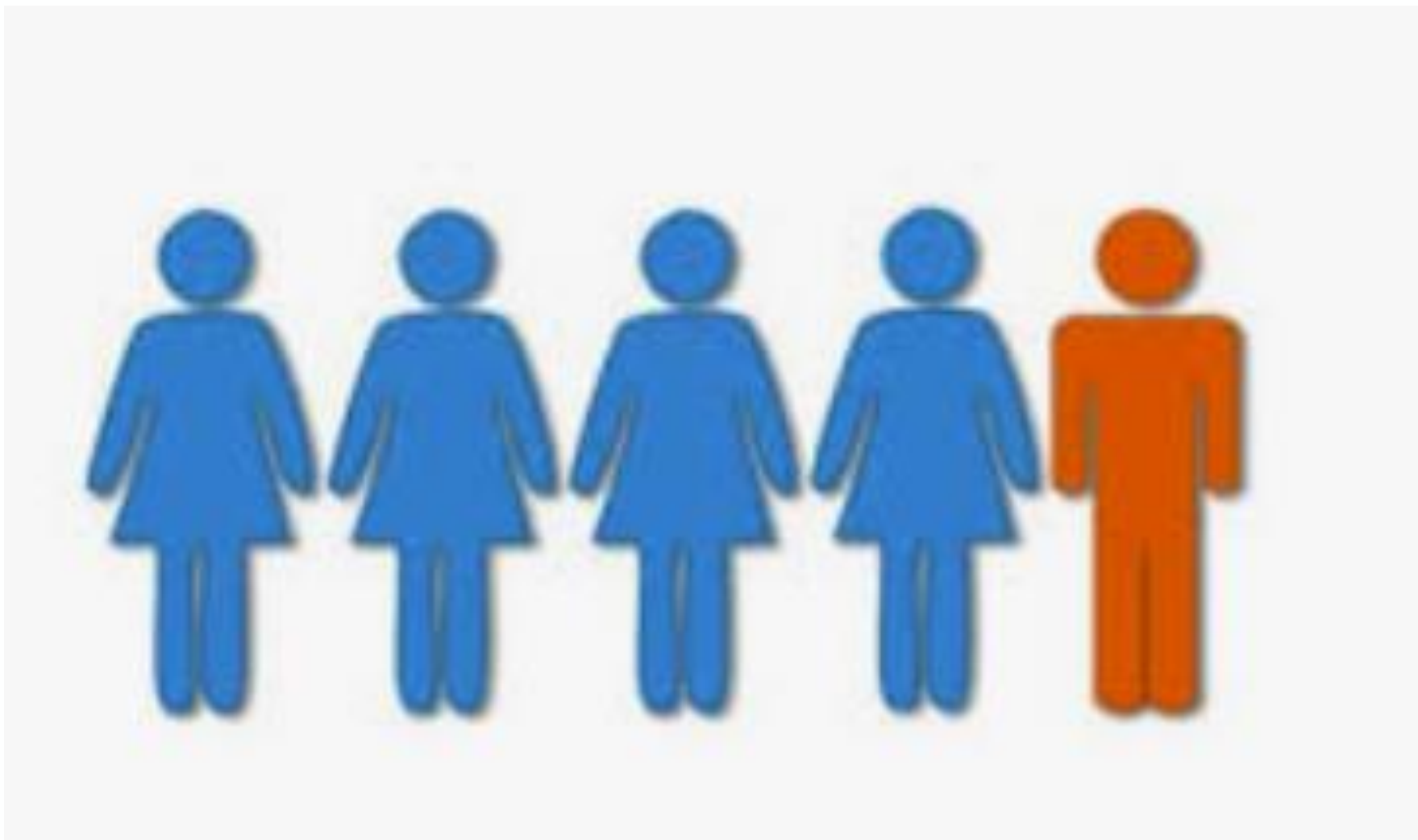


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Erin Hysom
Senior Child Nutrition Policy Analyst
Food Research and Action Center



Food Insecurity in the U.S.



- Nearly 1:5 children live in food insecure households
- 33% of children facing food insecurity are likely ineligible for federal nutrition programs





School Meals

Reduce

Food Insecurity

Improve

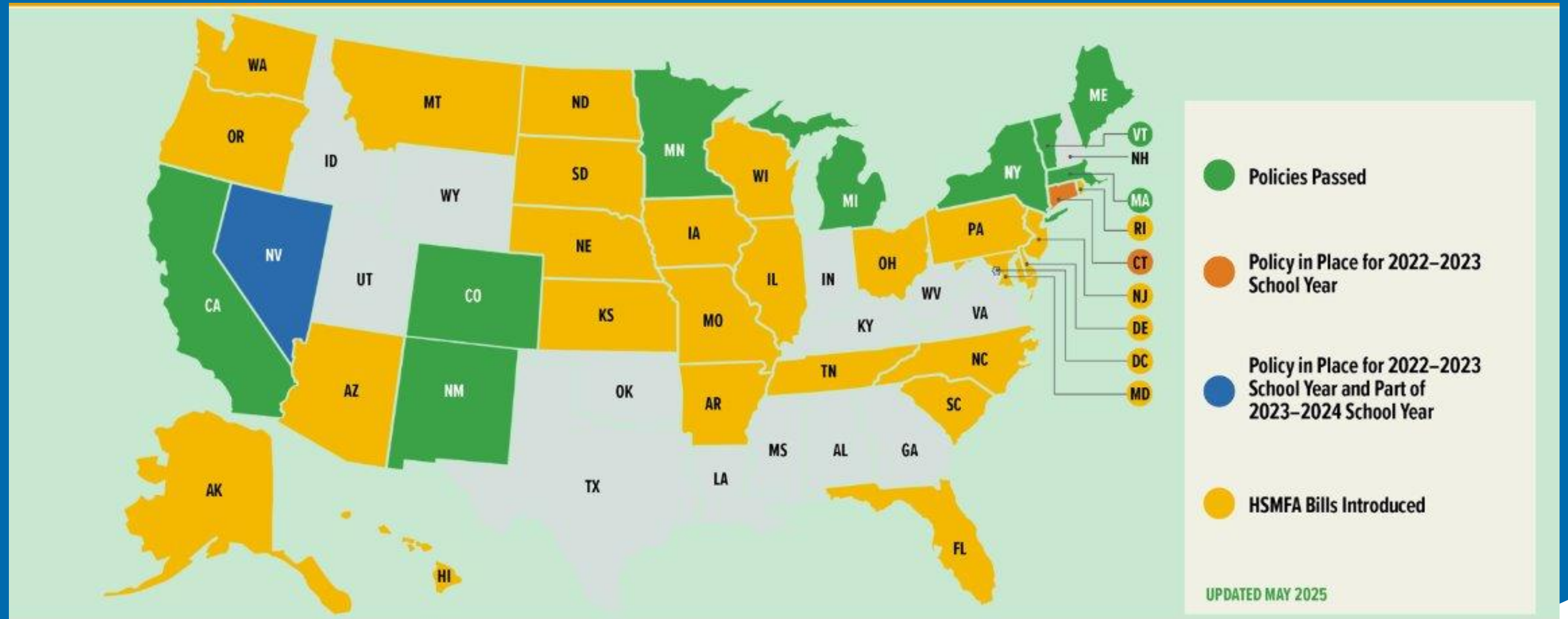
Students' Nutrient Intake & Health Outcomes

Support

Academic Achievement

Photo Credit: Fulton County Public Schools

Healthy School Meals for All





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Solutions & Successes

Panel Discussion



NY Universal Free School Meals

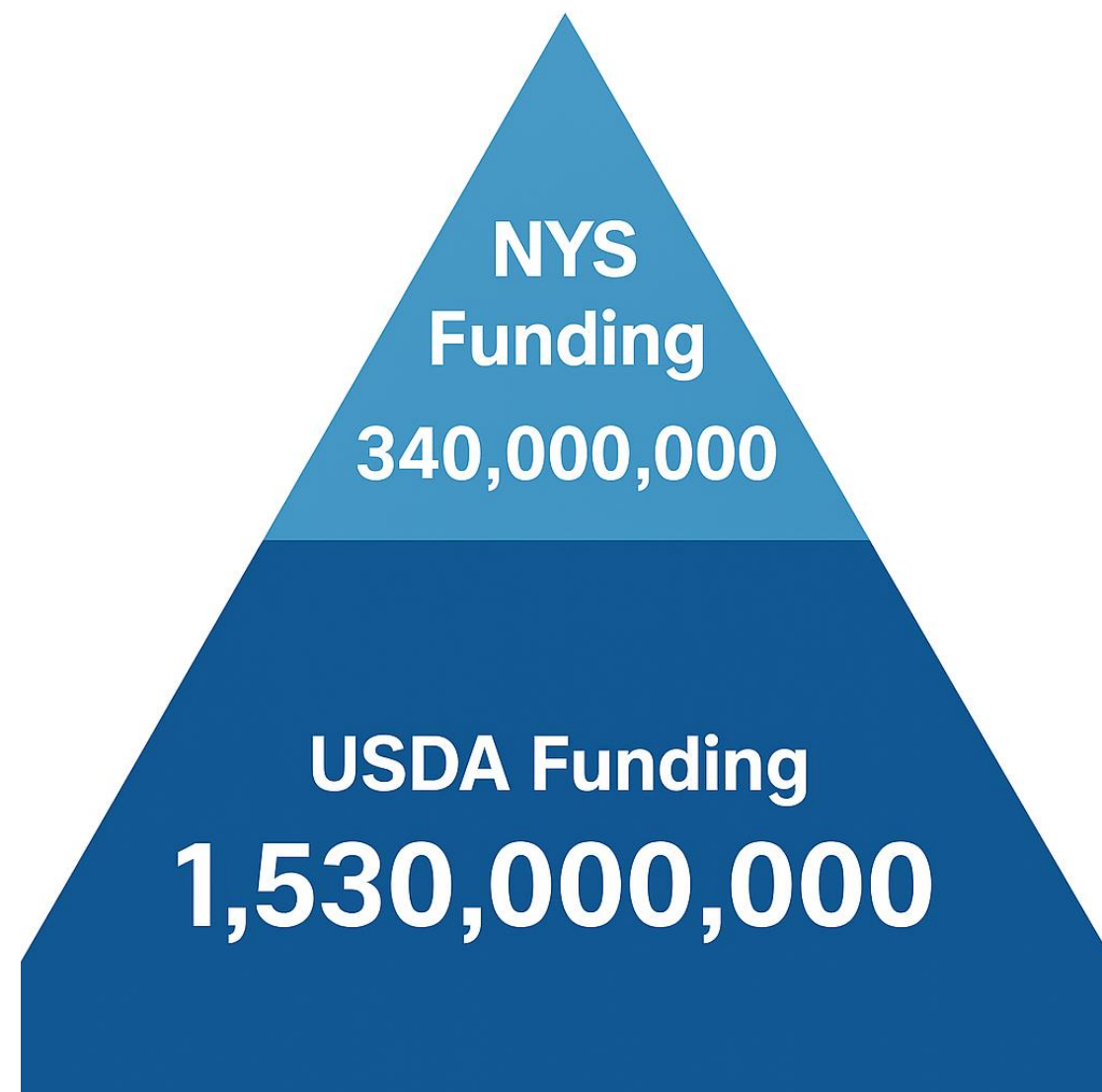
Kimberly Vumbaco

Child Nutrition Programs Director



New York State
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
Knowledge > Skill > Opportunity

NY Universal Free School Meals



9th State to implement a universal free program

- funded with \$340M in the FY2026 state budget
- provides free meals to 2.7 million NY students
- public, charter, and non-public schools can participate

NY Universal Free School Meals

School Implementation



participate in federal lunch/breakfast



maximize federal reimbursement through federal free meal provisions



maximize the number of students directly certified for federal free meals



promote awareness and access to SNAP

A PROGRAM OF THE
CENTER FOR FOOD ACTION

Hunger Free New Jersey





SCHOOL MEALS
for ALL
NEW JERSEY

ROAD TO SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL

REST
STOP



2020
Healthy Meals for All due to COVID-19 Pandemic



May 2018
Required implementation of Breakfast After the Bell Program in public schools where 70 percent or more of enrolled students qualify for free or reduced price meals

2021
\$.10 Supplement for Breakfast After the Bell Foodservice Model

2019
State Payment of student portion of reduced meal cost



September 2022
Elementary, Middle and High schools in which 10% or more of enrolled students qualify for free and reduced price meals are required to offer the School Breakfast Program (decreased from 20%)

2023
NJDA applied to be part of a pilot program using Medicaid to support Direct Certification of students. The program was implemented for the 2024/25 School year.

September 2022
Working Class Families/ New Jersey Expanded Income Eligibility (199% of Federal Poverty Level)

March 2023
NJSNA becomes a founding member of the NJ School Meals For All Coalition

January 2024
Required implementation of Breakfast After the Bell Working Class Families Act

July 2024
New Jersey Expanded Income Eligibility Expansion (Made law Inclusive of Nonpublic Schools / 224% of Federal Poverty Level)

Affecting
over 300,000
students



Summer EBT
Over 700,000
cards sent

70 million dollars in funding



**School
Meals for All
New Jersey**

School Meals for All NJ Steering Committee

- Hunger Free New Jersey
- NJ School Nutrition Association (NJSNA)
- American Heart Association, NJ
- Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)
- Food Corps

<https://hungerfreenj.org/>

Better days
start with a
FULL BELLY.





Redefining Readiness

Creating a Culture of Wholeness through Healthy
School & Breakfast Initiatives

Tiffany Etheridge, Principal
Baltimore City Public Schools

Background

Belmont Elementary is a community school located in the heart of West Baltimore. We serve students in Pre-K through 5th grade. We are a 100% Title I school. Breakfast and lunch are free to all of our students.

Access to fresh, affordable food is limited. That means for many of our students, the first balanced meal they can count on each day is the one they get at school.

Belmont Elementary was named one of *Healthiest Schools in the Nation*, the only school in Baltimore City to receive this distinction 4 years in a row. We are intentional about the social, emotional, physical and mental health of our students and families. This includes building healthy habits early. Food and nutrition play a big role in our efforts.

Breakfast After the Bell

Belmont's previous model was held in the cafeteria and it did not service the number of students we knew needed to eat.

Now...

Mornings start with our Breakfast in the Classroom model. It's grab-and-go: students come through the cafeteria line at entry, and before they power up for the day, they have access to whole grains, dairy, and fruit.

It's quick, it's accessible, and it ensures no child has to learn on an empty stomach.



ADANE Support

American Dairy Association Northeast has been instrumental in helping us sustain this work and elevating it.

Through the Hometown Grant, we were able to improve our Health and Wellness Room—a gym we transformed from a classroom space that furthers our mission of wholeness.

We have also been able to provide our students out of school opportunities, including field trips and extended programs.

The grant investment didn't just give us equipment and opportunities for scholars, it gave us momentum, visibility, and a platform to keep wellness at the center of our students' lives.

Impact

The impact has been clear. At the end of SY25 we saw a 20.7% percent increase in literacy scores on our MCAP state assessment in literacy and 12.4% in mathematics.

Chronic absenteeism is down 15%.

Research shows that when students eat breakfast, they're more focused, more engaged, and better able to retain what they learn.

When kids know they'll be nourished in body and in spirit, they show up—and they succeed.



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Edwin Estrada

Board President
Enlarged City School District of
Middletown, NY





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Lindsay Juliano

VP of Youth Health & Wellness

American Dairy Association North East





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Anthony Singleton
Youth Engagement Specialist
American Dairy Association North East





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Thank You

For more information, contact:

Schools@milK4u.org

