

The NYC school food program serves more meals each day than the entire population of Washington DC.

Community Food Advocates (CFA) spearheads the Lunch 4 Learning (L4L) Coalition, which successfully **secured Universal Free School Lunch (UFL) for all 1.1 million NYC public school students in 2017**. The scale and reach of the school meals program is unmatched. Prior to the pandemic, the Office of Food and Nutrition Services (OFNS) served an average of 900,000 daily meals.

UFL eliminates structural barriers and ensures all students have access to healthy and nutritious school meals. In the years since the adoption of UFL, we've seen an average daily increase of 26,000 students who participate in the school lunch program. For many students, school is the only place they can get three hot meals a day.

Participating in school meals has positive mental and physical health benefits and has been linked to **improvements in attendance, behavior, and academic success.**

Students who eat school lunch:

- Eat healthier than students who bring food from home, regardless of income.¹
- Perform better in Math and ELA test scores, equivalent to up to 10-weeks of learning.²



Universal Free School Meals & COVID-19

Thanks to UFL, every NYC public school student was eligible to receive **\$420 in Pandemic EBT** food funds to cover meals missed due to school closures during Spring 2020. This automatically placed food funds in the hands of all NYC families with school-aged children and infused **\$462 million federal dollars into the local economy.** More benefits will be issued for the 2020-2021 school year.

1. https://www.wilder.org/sites/default/files/imports/Cargill_lit_review_1-14.pdf
 2. https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/uploadedFiles/cpr/publications/working_papers2/wp203.pdf

Universal free school lunch was a foundational step towards building an **accessible, innovative, enjoyable and equitable** school lunch program.

To build on the foundation of UFL and to work toward a vision of a school meals program that is welcoming, enjoyable and valued by all members of the school community, we recommend:

1. Investment in the school cafeteria environment through OFNS's successful and cost-effective cafeteria redesign model;
2. Expansion of menu options, including halal and kosher meals; and
3. Ongoing and responsive communication with students, parents, and the community.



1. Investment in the school cafeteria environment. We recommend the City commit an additional \$30 million per year in the DOE's 5-Year Capital Plan to Expand the Food Court Style ("enhanced") cafeterias.

OFNS has rolled out an innovative cafeteria redesign in 34 middle and high school buildings that serve 60,000 students across the city. The Chancellor has committed \$25 million for approximately 50 more schools. We call for an additional \$150 million towards a planned phase-in of 300 more cafeterias over 5 years. The food court style serving line includes more daily menu options, speeds up the serving line, and provides a presentation that dramatically increases the appeal of the food.

2. Expansion of menu options, including access to halal and kosher meals. Making halal and kosher options accessible to all NYC public school students who need them would make DOE policy consistent with every other NYC government food-serving agency.

L4L Coalition partners have heard from students and parents from all over the city about the need for halal and kosher school food options. **Families would save an average of \$900 per year per student** if the school meals met their needs and they did not have to provide lunch from home every day.



3. Ensure ongoing, broad reaching and innovative communication about school food.

Universal Free School Lunch reverses decades of the discriminatory policy that separated children by income in the cafeteria. OFNS must invest in a comprehensive and creative rebranding and sustained marketing campaign. Annual funds must be dedicated to promote UFL and other initiatives such as New York Thursdays, which aims to support local NYS growers.