



THE CITYWIDE COUNCIL ON HIGH SCHOOLS
THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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December 9th, 2015

Hon. Bill de Blasio
Office of the Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio,

As parent leaders and representatives of thousands of families of New York City public school students citywide, we are calling on you to keep your promise to bring universal free school lunch to New York City public school students. In your campaign policy book, *One New York, Rising Together*, you promised to:

Support Universal School Meals in Schools

“Bill de Blasio will make free school lunch available to all public school children at most city schools by taking advantage of the new Community Eligibility Option (CEO) for low-income school districts. This program would take advantage of the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which the DOE has failed to do. This allows schools to replace the current inefficient, application-based system for school lunches with a paperless data-driven system that allows students to eat free of charge and free of stigma.”

We ask you to make good on that promise and expand universal free school lunch to all New York City public school students in your Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget. We urge you to address hunger in our schools by ensuring that children have equal and universal access to healthy school meals, regardless of family income or immigration status.

Students must be well-nourished to learn. Hundreds of thousands of income-eligible students in New York City public schools do not participate in the school lunch program due to the poverty stigma associated with traditional, fee-based school lunch. Many of these students—as well as others whose parents are not income eligible for free lunch yet cannot afford to pay school lunch fees—struggle through lessons on an empty stomach. In addition, despite urgent need, many immigrant parents are reluctant to fill out the school lunch forms for fear of government reprisal and the pursuit of lunch fees from parents who cannot afford it both put principals in the uncomfortable role of bill collector and directly undermines your efforts to increase parent engagement.

Offering universal free and healthy school meals without identifying students by income is fundamental to eliminating stigma, increasing participation, and addressing inequities in New York City public schools.

We applaud you, Chancellor Farina, the City Council, and the Public Advocate for instituting universal free school lunch in stand-alone middle schools. However, the majority of our City’s children are still unnecessarily subjected to the inequities and stigma encountered in the income-based school lunch system. The City can’t afford to ignore the direct health and educational benefits to our children and the financial relief to families of free, accessible school lunch.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. The Lunch 4 Learning campaign’s Parent Caucus would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to further discuss this issue.

Sincerely,

Name: *Citywide Council on High Schools*

Parent leadership body and title: *Citywide Council on High Schools signed on December 9th, 2015*

Approximate number of families you represent: *All New York City High Schools Parents and Guardians*