



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September, 6, 2017
N-10, 2017-18

CHANCELLOR FARIÑA ANNOUNCES FREE SCHOOL LUNCH FOR ALL

Starting tomorrow, lunch is free for every NYC public school student

NEW YORK — Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña, City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Public Advocate Leticia James today announced that lunch is now free for every student at every public school across New York City. Free School Lunch for All will provide over 200,000 more students with free lunch starting this school year. Last school year, 75% of students were eligible for free lunch and starting this school year, 100% of families will be eligible to receive free lunch.

New York City has sought all forms of funding for meal reimbursement and is now eligible to receive the highest reimbursement from the federal government through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This federal program allows school districts to provide meals free of charge to all enrolled students. The Free School Lunch for All initiative will benefit all families regardless of where they live or attend school.

“We know that students cannot learn or thrive in school if they are hungry all day,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “Free school lunch will not only ensure that every kid in New York City has the fuel they need to succeed but also further our goal of providing an excellent and equitable education for all students.”

“Students need healthy meals to stay focused in school, and it is a major step forward that every New York City student will have access to free breakfast and lunch every day. Free School Lunch for All will provide financial relief to families and ensure all students are receiving nutritious meals so that they can succeed in the classroom and beyond,” said **Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña**.

In preparation for the 2017-2018 school year, the New York State Education Department implemented a new data matching engine that refined the methods to identify families eligible for free lunch through the Direct Certification Matching Process (DCMP) – a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiative that qualifies children for free meals using electronic documentation obtained directly from other government programs including Medicaid and SNAP. This new matching system provides a more efficient and accurate process for matching students across a range of forms that families already complete. This new matching process yielded an increase in the number of students directly certified – or matched to another government program – and increased the direct certification rate, allowing the City to qualify for

the highest level of reimbursement in the federal CEP program. The number of families living in poverty has not increased; the changes to the matching process allow the City to better identify families.

Free School Lunch for All will apply to all schools and students who participate in SchoolFood, including charter and non-public schools. Breakfast is already provided free of charge to all students, and this administration expanded the Breakfast in the Classroom initiative to nearly 300 schools.

“Many families struggle to feed their children nutritious meals each day,” said **State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia**. “We have a duty to make sure that our students receive the support they need to succeed in school and in life. And providing healthy meals to all who need them is an essential component of that support. I applaud Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Farina for working with us to make this possible for so many children.”

“Students need to be able to eat a healthy lunch in school so they can be prepared to learn,” said **Director of Food Policy Barbara Turk**. “I am thrilled that NYC schools are providing universal free lunch, so that balanced, nourishing meals are available to all students, regardless of their ability to pay.”

The expansion of Free School Lunch for All is part of the City’s ongoing efforts to ensure every student is provided with a healthy meal. Each summer, the DOE provides free breakfast and lunch across the city to any New Yorker under the age of 18 free of charge through the Summer Meals program. In 2015, the DOE launched NY Thursdays, providing schools with locally sourced or produced food every Thursday. The DOE is making strides in ensuring students are served high-quality foods in a sustainable way and converted from using a polystyrene tray to serving all meals in an eco-friendly compostable plate. Additionally, eight schools received cafeteria renovations last year and the Capital Plan includes funding to update 18 additional cafeterias.

Across all schools, the City will continue to build on this sustained progress, as well as record-high graduation rates, record-high college enrollment rates, record-low dropout rates, and a high-quality pre-K seat for every New York City 4-year-old. The Mayor and Chancellor’s Equity and Excellence for All agenda is building a pathway to success in college and careers for all students.

Our schools are starting earlier – free, full-day, high-quality education for three-year-olds and four-year-olds through 3-K for All and Pre-K for All. They are strengthening foundational skills and instruction earlier – Universal Literacy so that every student is reading on grade level by the end of 2nd grade; and Algebra for All to improve elementary- and middle-school math instruction and ensure that all 8th graders have access to algebra. They are offering students more challenging, hands-on, college and career-aligned coursework – Computer Science for All brings 21st-century computer science instruction to every school, and AP for All will give all high school students access to at least five Advanced Placement courses. Along the way, they are giving students and families additional support through College Access for All, Single Shepherd, and investment in Community Schools. They are also ensuring students are being active and

learning healthy habits through high-quality physical education instruction that's being expanded and improved by programs including PE Works and Universal PE.

“I am so pleased that the Department of Education is offering universal free lunch and eliminating lunch fees for all students in our public schools this school year,” said **Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito**. “We in the New York City Council have pushed hard to eliminate lunch fees to not only improve childhood nutrition but also to help students do well in school. Kids cannot learn when they are hungry – it is as simple as that. With the Council’s continued advocacy and support for the DOE and our students, today we are finally able to make universal free lunch a reality for every single student in our public schools. I am proud of the work the Council has done on behalf of our students, and I thank the Mayor and Chancellor for their unwavering support for this program. This is a victory for our students, their families, teachers, administrators and our City as a whole.”

“It’s simple: no child should go hungry at school,” said **Public Advocate Letitia James**. “We’ve been pushing for universal school lunch for years and to see it come to fruition is exciting for our children, families and educators. As we begin a new school year, this initiative will ensure that every child has access to free, nutritious lunch. I thank Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña for funding universal school lunch so every student has an opportunity to succeed.”

“Students should have the ability to participate fully in their classes and other activities during the school day, without worrying about going hungry at lunchtime. This program will provide all students with that assurance, and eliminate the stigmatization of young women and men who receive a free lunch. I want to thank Chancellor Fariña and Mayor de Blasio for their commitment to offering the resources that allow students to flourish in our public schools,” said **U.S. Rep. Yvette Clarke**.

“Access to proper, nutritious meals are critical to the health and academic performance of our children,” said **U.S. Rep. Joe Crowley**. “The expansion of free breakfast and lunch is not just a relief to the countless families feeling the pinch financially, but it helps ensure our children are in the best position to learn and succeed. The federal dollars that are making this program possible will have a profound impact in our communities and I commend Chancellor Fariña for her role in ensuring every single student is able to take advantage of it.”

“Healthy bodies make healthy minds. Offering every student at a NYC public school free lunch will not only improve learning, it will help ensure those who cannot afford lunch aren’t unfairly stigmatized. I applaud the City for making this move to support the wellbeing of our young students,” said **U.S. Rep. Eliot Engel**.

“Nothing is more important than ensuring that all children eat a good lunch. By dropping the income verification and allowing all children to eat free of charge, the de Blasio Administration is removing the stigma from those who receive free lunches and making sure that no one foregoes lunch because they do not have the money to pay for it,” said **U.S. Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney**.

“Hunger is an easily forgotten but powerful barrier to education,” said **U.S. Rep. Gregory W. Meeks**. “Access to a free and healthy meal during the school day removes one more obstacle to success. I would like to thank Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña for ensuring no child goes hungry in our schools.”

“As the mother of two young kids who attend New York City public schools, I know first-hand how important it is for children to eat lunch at school,” said **U.S. Rep. Grace Meng, a Founder and Co-Chair of the Congressional Kids Safety Caucus**. “A nutritious lunch helps kids learn better during class and helps ensure healthy growth. I commend the de Blasio Administration for making school lunches free to all public school students so that no child is forced to learn on an empty stomach.”

“This is a tremendous advance that will benefit working families and children throughout our city and I applaud the Mayor for this progress. Kids can’t concentrate on their studies if they don’t have enough to eat and this initiative will ensure all children in New York’s public schools are ready to learn. We must use every tool at our disposal to ensure healthy food is available for children and families. To that end, I’ll continue working at the federal level to ensure adequate resources are made available for nutrition programs,” said **U.S. Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez**.

“Free school lunch for all is a years-overdue policy change that just makes sense, both morally and financially,” said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**. “There’s no reason to stigmatize students who qualify for free lunch, and the extra bureaucracy involved in collecting money offsets much or all of the revenue anyway. Universal free school lunch is simpler and better. I’m thrilled that Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña are committing to make this change.”

“In the 21st Century we simply should not allow our children to go hungry in school,” said **State Senator Liz Krueger**. “Universal school lunch is a proven policy that takes the shame and stigma out of free meals and ensures that all our kids have full stomachs and the best chance to learn and grow in school. I commend Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña for taking this important step to support New York families.”

“Students in the City of New York will be treated equally,” said **Assembly Member Catherine Nolan, mother of a recent NYC school graduate**. “It’s important children receive a nutritious, delicious lunch in a decent, working cafeteria. I pledge my support to this initiative, which has been a long time priority of mine statewide, as chair of the Assembly Education Committee.”

“A hungry student is a student who can’t achieve her or his full academic potential,” said **Assembly Member Linda B. Rosenthal**. “For so many students, school is the only place where they have access to a nutritious meal. Providing free lunch to the City’s 1.1 million public school students will ensure that their bodies are fed so that their brains can be nourished. I applaud the bold action for New York’s students that resulted from this partnership between the State and City of New York.”

“A number of recent studies have shown that healthy meals in school contribute dramatically to student thinking skills, behavior and health, with improved performance on tests, less

absenteeism from sickness and reduced aggression and discipline problems,” said **Assembly Member Luis Sepulveda**. “Expanding free meals to all students will also help cut down on students eating junk food, with all the health problems that brings with it. I salute Mayor de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña for this important and worthy step in contributing to quality education in our city school system.”

“Free School Lunch For All will ensure that no child is forced to go to class hungry,” said **Council Education Committee Chair Daniel Dromm**. “By combatting food insecurity in our public schools, we help students keep their minds focused on their studies. This holistic approach to education is a proven recipe for success. I hail this progress and will continue to work alongside the administration to move our schools forward.”

“No kid should have to go to school with an empty stomach or be singled out for getting free lunch,” said **Council Member Julissa Ferreras-Copeland**. “Thanks to the expansion of this program, students will be able to focus on what really matters: school. Millions of children and their families will be able to take full advantage of this service without fearing the stigma around it. Providing free and healthy meals to all our students has been a priority for this Administration and I'm glad to stand with the Mayor as we roll out this expansion.”

“There is now such thing as a free lunch in New York City public schools,” said **Council Member Ben Kallos**. “When I was a child attending City public schools, I often went without food, because going hungry was better than getting picked on for receiving free or reduced school lunch. I've been fighting alongside Public Advocate Letitia James and Education Chair Danny Dromm at hearing after hearing for four years so that no child has to make the same unfortunate choice I did years ago, to go hungry. Our families should be able to trust that when they send their kids to public school, they won't come home hungry. Thank you to Speaker Mark-Viverito, Public Advocate James, Education Chair Dromm, Finance Chair Julissa Ferreras-Copeland and Community Food Advocates Executive Director Liz Accles for their advocacy, and Mayor De Blasio and Chancellor Fariña for making universal school lunch a reality.”

“Our public school system is a promise of equal opportunity that we make to our country's children,” said **Council Member Corey Johnson, Chair of the Health Committee**. “Thanks to Mayor de Blasio, the pain of hunger or shame of need will no longer keep New York's students from achieving their full potential. Thank you to Mayor de Blasio, for keeping New York on the front lines of progressive causes and to Chancellor Fariña for masterfully overseeing our schools. Thanks also to Speaker Mark-Viverito and Education Chair Daniel Dromm for their leadership and to all the advocates whose work made this possible.”

“Today's announcement marks a major milestone in our City's fight against childhood hunger by creating a public school system that is inclusive for all families in New York City, regardless of income,” said **Council Member Margaret S. Chin**. “I thank Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Farina for their efforts to secure this vital funding. By allowing all families to be eligible to receive free lunch, we are ensuring healthy learning environments where no child has to worry about receiving a nutritious meal to stay focused in school.”

“Good nutrition is a predicate to academic success,” said **Council Member Andrew Cohen**. “And no child should have to feel like the odd one out. Universal free lunch is a game changer for our kids.”

“Free School Lunch for All will make our students stronger and more equipped to learn,” said **Council Member Dan Garodnick**. “Immigration status and the stigma of poverty should not hold families back from obtaining this vital service, and I am proud New York City is expanding this program to make sure no child goes hungry during the school day.”

“A free school lunch isn't really free if students must reveal their socioeconomic status to their classmates in order to eat,” said **Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson**. “By making lunch truly free for 100% of our students in all of our public schools, we are removing any remaining stigma attached to this important program and making sure that for New York City Schools kids, hunger isn't a barrier to academic success. I thank Mayor de Blasio and Schools Chancellor Carmen Fariña for their leadership and dedication to making our schools a place where all students can thrive.”

“In New York City, no child should ever go hungry. Providing free school lunch for all will eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy, remove the stigma associated with free lunch eligibility, improve our children’s health and wellness, and allow students to focus on their schoolwork without feeling hungry or worrying about having food to eat for lunch,” said **Council Member Barry S. Grodenchik**.

“This is major win for our public school students. Too many of our young people struggle to stay focus in school because they are hungry. And, even more so, some kids won’t accept free lunch because they feel they will be labeled ‘poor’ and bullied. Providing universal free lunch is the smart and best way to make sure that our youngsters stay focused in the classroom and there’s no stigma attached for accepting the service. I applaud Mayor de Blasio for implementing the free lunch program for all public school students,” said **Council Member Andy King, Chair of the Subcommittee on Libraries**.

“No child should be forced to learn on an empty stomach,” said **Council Member Peter Koo**. “School children should be worrying about acing their exams, not how to handle themselves in the lunch line. Free lunch for all students will take the shame out of hunger. Thank you to all my colleagues for supporting this important program.”

“Providing Universal Free School Lunches is one of the most effective ways New York can invest in our children's future,” said **Council Member Carlos Menchaca**. “The cost of universal free school lunch programs are modest and their positive impacts on kids and families are well documented. I thank the parents, educators and students who stood up to demand good, nutritious lunches for all students. New York City has officially joined other cities across the nation that also recognize student nutrition is a key to academic achievement.”

“Offering free school lunch will give our young scholars the energy their minds need to be ready to learn,” said **Council Member I. Daneek Miller**. “I am proud that once again we are taking the critical steps forward to support the future leaders of our City and would like to thank Mayor

Bill de Blasio, Chancellor Carmen Fariña, her team at the Department of Education, and all the advocates who made today's announcements possible.”

“I commend Mayor de Blasio for remaining committed to providing universal free lunch in our schools,” said **Council Member Annabel Palma**. “This investment will improve academic performance by ensuring students have access to nutritious meals during the school day. Students deserve a right to learn in healthy and hunger-free environs; this is but one step in the right direction toward achieving that objective.”

“By providing free school lunches to all students, we not only ensure that hungry children are not kept from eating due to a lack of money, but that there is no stigma attached to accepting free lunch,” said **Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez**. “As a former high school teacher, it broke my heart to see students unable to afford a meal in the middle of the day. This transformative policy will help students focus on their work, ensuring they have energy throughout the day and that no child is kept hungry during school hours.”

“Knowing the role that good nutrition plays in the learning process, providing a healthy lunch is key to successful learning,” said **Council Member Debi Rose**. “Today, we take a significant step forward for the health and well-being of our city's students by ensuring that each and every student has this opportunity, without paperwork, barriers or stigmas attached. I have been a longtime advocate for Free School Lunch for All, and I thank Mayor de Blasio for making this important investment in our city's youth.”

“We all know the value of ensuring that our kids eat healthy, especially while learning, which is why this announcement is so important,” said **Council Member Rafael Salamanca, Jr.** “In my district in the South Bronx, a community with food insecurity, this is a game changer.”

“I'm thrilled that DOE will be providing free school lunch to all students,” said **Council Member James Vacca**. “I have been a supporter of universal free school lunch for years because students should not have to worry about whether or not they will be getting a meal. Study after study indicates that a nutritious and fulfilling lunch is integral to student performance. This initiative will help our students achieve their full potential.”

“This helps New York City's working families who struggled to pay \$300 a year for school lunch, and it eliminates the stigma that we know kept some children from eating. I am proud that our city made it a priority to feed our children,” said **Michael Mulgrew, president of the United Federation of Teachers**.

“We want our students to have hungry minds, not hungry bodies,” said **Council of School Supervisors and Administrators President Mark Cannizzaro**. “We commend Mayor de Blasio for this initiative, which will undoubtedly impact how our students live and learn.”

“With every child in our public schools now able to enjoy a free school lunch, the shame and stigma felt by so many students is now a thing of the past. Thankfully, we no longer have to worry about children going hungry in the classroom and this can only enhance academic achievement. We thank Mayor de Blasio, our union sisters and brothers, elected officials and

education advocates who joined in this successful fight,” said **Henry Garrido, Executive Director, D.C. 37**.

“For the first time, ALL 1.1 million NYC school kids will have access to free school lunch, leveling the playing field in all of New York City's school cafeterias. Kids will be able to get the nutritious food they need in order to thrive in school,” said **Rachael Ray, Author, Day Time Host and Child Nutrition Advocate**. “This takes an important step closer to ending childhood hunger, better test scores and better nutrition for NYC kids.”

“Lunch 4 Learning Campaign's public school parents, students and advocates are thrilled that ALL New York City public school students will have access to free lunch, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Now we will finally put an end to the stigma and other financial barriers that prevent children from receiving the food they need to thrive in our schools,” said **Liz Accles, Executive Director, Community Food Advocates**.

“The new school year is definitely off to the right start. We are so pleased that every New York City public school student, regardless of age or zip code, will be able to have a free, healthy lunch. This step forward combats stigma and reduces financial hardship. We applaud the administration and give special thanks to the all of the students and advocates who tirelessly pressed for this important change,” said **Jennifer March, Citizens' Committee for Children**.

“There is no more important step the City could have taken to promote the health, academic success, and wellbeing of our children. Free school lunch for all, without stigma or bureaucratic hassle, will not only secure access to healthy school meals for all NYC students, it will enhance the entire school dining experience. Now school lunch can truly become an integral part of the school day, a social center and a learning experience, integrated with the curriculum. The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute applauds the Mayor, the City Council, the Office of School Food and Nutrition Services, and all of the advocates in the Lunch For Learning Campaign who have worked so hard to bring us to this day,” said **Jan Poppendieck, Senior Fellow, CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute and author, *Free For All: Fixing School Food in America***.

“We thank Mayor de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña for making universal free school lunch a reality for all New York City public school students. One in five children in our city don't always know when or where their next meal will come, and lunch at school may be their only nutritious option,” said **Jilly Stephens, City Harvest's Chief Executive Officer**. “As City Harvest works hard this year to rescue and deliver 59 million pounds of good food for New Yorkers in need, we look forward to continuing to collaborate with the city to ensure that children and their families do not go hungry.”

###

Contact: Chancellor's Press Office (212) 374-5141