



# 2022 Position Paper

School Nutrition Professionals mobilized immediately when the pandemic closed school doors statewide back in March of 2020. Despite the many challenges they were subjected to, such as staff shortages, supply chain issues and increased operating costs, they continued to ensure student access to healthy school meals at no charge for all students, through the extension of federal waivers. These waivers however are set to expire on June 30, 2022.

School breakfast, lunch, summer meals and afterschool meals have offered a lifeline for families struggling with economic uncertainty. These programs, proven to fuel student success and combat child hunger and obesity, will be critical to our state's recovery. To support the health and achievement of New York's students and to ensure the financial sustainability of school meal programs, the 3,500+ members of the New York School Nutrition Association (NYSNA) call on New York elected officials to:

## **Beginning in school year 2022-2023, provide healthy school meals at no charge for all students in New York State – regardless of income.**

- Provide all students equal access to school breakfast and lunch and eliminate any stigma or barriers for students. Nutritious school meals are proven to support learning, improve attendance, classroom behavior and contribute to overall health and wellness.
- Ensure that no child goes hungry during the school day or accrues unpaid meal debt, a burden on both families and school district budgets.
- Ensure that over 2,000 schools and nearly 800,000 students in New York State will continue to have access to healthy meals at no charge once the waivers expire on June 30, 2022.

## **Improve the Child Nutrition Program (CNP) by Transferring it from State Education Department (SED) into the Department of Agriculture and Markets (AGM), as proposed by Governor Hochul.**

- Allowing AGM to oversee the CNP will result in a smoother operation with school food service programs.
  - Moving the CNP under AGM puts it with the agency that knows food supply and understands what farmers can and cannot do. This insight then creates regulations and systems that are smoother for farmers and smoother for school food service programs, leading to an expansion of healthy local foods as opposed to a reduction.
  - In the four other states that have already made this transition, their school food service programs are reporting more positive feedback in school nutrition. Florida, specifically, noted that schools reported a higher level of satisfaction with working with the agriculture agency regarding their school-based child nutrition needs.
- Transitioning the CNP to AGM will result in more economic development throughout the state.
  - As the state agency tasked with overseeing agriculture in New York, AGM works directly with New York producer networks and the farm community. This working relationship will allow the CNP to expand and have a major impact on economic development throughout the state.
  - AGM also oversees the Grown & Certified program, which is a great way for school food service programs to identify farms, producers, and other growers that have appropriate food safety certifications from which they can purchase fresh food and other products.

- AGM will be able to increase access to healthy foods in New York school food service programs, helping students fight childhood obesity and helping them attain a better education.
  - With AGM in charge of the CNP, it will be able to use its institutional knowledge to get the most out of the federal money and gain access to more local and nutritious foods. Through Farm to School grants AGM is already helping several needy districts connect with their local growers to move away from processed foods. Giving AGM the full scope of resources afforded through the CNP will only bolster their efforts and expand on the work that it is doing to ensure every student has access to healthy foods to combat the childhood obesity epidemic.
  - AGM's ability to expand the CNP, both in quantity of food and quantity of areas reached, will further expand the number of students that can access healthy foods. As noted above, an efficiently run CNP increases availability of nutritional food. Giving AGM more ability to work with local food producers and food distribution centers, healthier foods can be delivered to higher need areas that, due to their geographic location, are forced to rely on alternatives that are not as healthy.

**Provide \$5 million dollars in equipment grant money to help update New York State school kitchens**

- NYS received 543 applications for equipment requests which totaled approximately \$5 million dollars. NYS was only able to fund a total of 159 equipment grant awards totaling \$1,805,067.
- Many school food service programs throughout the state are working with antiquated, non-energy efficient equipment which in turn is negatively affecting the environment. Providing equipment grants could be a great use of taxpayer dollars.

The 3,500+ members of the NYSNA also support the New York Grown Food For New York Kids Coalition (NYGFFNYK) with the following initiatives:

**Expand the 30% program to include all school meals, increase reimbursement, codify program, call for a rulemaking process, and maintain the \$10 million placeholder.**

- Expand student access to healthy local foods at more meals during the school day and increase school food purchases from New York producers.
- This will also reduce the administrative burden related to separating lunch purchases from other meal purchases.

**Codify and grow Farm to School grant programs.**

- Help increase the capacity of schools to procure and serve New York State farm products in school meal programs. Build sustainable, inclusive, and culturally relevant or responsive Farm to School programs.

**Raise small purchase threshold to match federal level.**

- Enable schools to purchase food more easily from New York farmers and producers, who often find it challenging to participate in formal bidding and procurement processes.