

# New York State Expansion of Free School Meals in the 2023-2024 School Year



In the FY24 State Budget, New York State invested \$134.6 million to expand free school meals through the federal Community Eligibility Provision<sup>1</sup> (CEP), creating a new CEP State Subsidy. The subsidy ensures all meals served are reimbursed at the “free rate”. This allows all CEP-eligible New York schools to provide free meals to all students without a financial burden on local districts.

At the start of the 2023-2024 school year, individual schools or groups of schools with at least 40% of “identified students”<sup>2</sup> were able to leverage this new state funding by participating in CEP. In October 2023, a federal rule change lowered the CEP eligibility threshold from 40% to 25%, allowing many more schools to participate. New York State Education Department (NYSED) allowed newly eligible schools to adopt CEP mid-year. **This rule change more than doubled the impact of New York’s investment to expand free school meals through CEP.**

The table below shows the total impact of the FY24 investment in expanding free school meals.

Impact of NYS Investment in Free School Meals in the 2023-2024 School Year	
	TOTAL IMPACT
Number of <b>new schools</b> offering free meals to all students through CEP	1,209
Number of <b>school districts</b> with new CEP schools	396
Number of <b>students gaining access</b> to free meals	347,347

**88% of NYS students have access to free school meals**

<sup>1</sup> CEP is a federal option that allows high poverty schools to offer free breakfast and lunch to all students.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Identified students’ includes all students who live in households that participate in: SNAP, Medicaid, TANF, and FDPIR; and students who are in foster care, in Head Start/Even Start, those who are experiencing homelessness, and migrants.

## The Healthy School Meals for All Coalition is calling for a permanent, statewide expansion of free school meals in the FY25 State Budget.

The state and federal expansions in FY24—followed by swift uptake by hundreds of schools—exemplify the unprecedented momentum toward universal free school meals for all students. While the FY24 investment was a critical step, approximately 321,000 students in more than 650 schools across New York remain ineligible for this vital support.

### ESTIMATED STUDENTS AND SCHOOLS LEFT OUT OF THE FY24 EXPANSION:

Number of <b>schools</b> left out of NYS expansion of free school meals	659
Number of NYS <b>students</b> without access to free school meals	320,911

Three NYS regions account for 78% of schools and 81% of students left out of the expansion. Nearly half of those left out – more than 145,000 students – are located on Long Island.

	Number of schools left out (%)	Number of students left out (%)
Long Island	276 (42%)	145,611 (45%)
Mid-Hudson	161 (24%)	80,215 (25%)
Western NY	76 (12%)	35,176 (11%)

### ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL COST TO ENSURE HEALTHY SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL:

To close the gap – and fully fund a statewide universal school meals program – the state will fund meal costs not covered by federal reimbursement, an anticipated annual investment of \$XM to \$XM.

Scenario 1: No increase in participation	\$76.4M
Scenario 2: Modest Increase in participation	\$77.4M
Scenario 3: Aggressive Increase in participation	\$90.4M

**It's time for New York to close the gap.**