

Miller Place Union Free School District

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January 30, 2025

Sent via US Postal Service (CM:RR)

The Honorable Kathy Hochul

Governor of New York State

NYS Capitol Building

Albany, NY 12224

Re: It's time to end hunger in NY schools: Fully fund statewide free school meals in the Executive Budget

Dear Governor Hochul,

We are writing to you because it is time for New York to become the ninth state to provide every child with access to free breakfast and lunch at school.

Funding Healthy School Meals for All in your FY2026 Executive Budget sends a strong message: Hunger has no place in our schools.

Historic investments in the FY2024 and FY2025 state budgets dramatically expanded access to school meals. But hundreds of thousands of students remain without access to free school meals. The majority of those students live on Long Island and in the Hudson Valley, areas with high costs of living and stark economic inequalities. Families in these communities are struggling, yet they lack the support that neighboring communities have from universal free school meal programs. Free school meals are estimated to save families \$165 per child per month in food costs—that's meaningful financial relief for New York families.

The FY2026 Executive Budget presents an opportunity for your administration to build on the significant progress you've made to make New York more affordable for all families.

Making free school meals available to all students has been shown to improve academic outcomes, particularly for kids who were previously ineligible for free meals. Classroom behavior and attendance improve. This policy will also broaden the scope of the growing Farm to School movement in New York.

School meals are a vital source of nutrition for kids, often accounting for nearly half of their daily calories. Across all income levels, school meals are among the healthiest meals kids eat; children who eat school meals consume more fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy than their peers.

The time is now to make free school meals available to every student in New York. We urge you to include funding for a truly universal free school meal program in your Executive Budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Reitan

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President, Board of Education

Bryan Makarius

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Vice President, Board of Education

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