

PINE PLAINS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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August 2026

Dear Pine Plains Families,

We are proud to share that for the 2026-2027 school year, all students in all Pine Plains schools will continue to receive breakfast and lunch at no cost through the District's continued participation in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This means every student has access to one free breakfast and one free lunch each day school is in session, regardless of family income. No application is required to receive these meals.

A Chef-Led Program Built for Pine Plains

Over the past year, we have built a strong foundation for a school meal program that is fresh, local, student-centered, and different from the traditional idea of school food. This year, we will continue to grow that foundation with more scratch recipes custom-developed for Pine Plains CSD, more BBQ and farm-to-table style meals, and menus designed with care for student wellness, energy, focus, and pride in our community.

Our goal is simple: to keep asking, "This is good, but how can it be better for our students and community?" That question will guide our kitchen culture, our menus, our purchasing, and the way we serve every child.

Meal Pricing for Additional Purchases

While one breakfast and one lunch are provided daily at no charge, additional meals may be purchased at the following current rates:

- Breakfast: \$2.00 (all schools)
- Lunch: \$2.75 (Cold Spring Early Learning Center and Seymour Smith)
- Lunch: \$3.25 (Stissing Mountain Junior/Senior High School)

A la carte items, such as snacks, bottled water, extra entrees, and other individual items, are not covered by CEP and are available for purchase separately. Any outstanding meal debt incurred before the start of the program will remain the responsibility of the family.

Even though meals are free for all students, we encourage every family to complete the annual household income verification form, available on our website or from your school's main office. This form helps the District secure important funding and may also qualify families for additional benefits, including reduced-cost internet, academic testing fee waivers, college application discounts, and other community-based services.

Nutrition Standards, Compliance, and Portions

As a public school meal program, Pine Plains CSD must follow USDA and NYSED requirements for the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and National School Lunch Program (NSLP). These standards apply across PreK-12 and include specific meal pattern requirements by age and grade group, required food components, whole grain-rich requirements, calorie ranges, sodium and saturated fat limits, and added-sugar standards.

For the 2026-2027 school year, families may notice continued adjustments to some menu items because schools must follow product-based added-sugar limits for breakfast cereals, yogurt, and flavored milk; whole grain-rich requirements; sodium standards; and grade-appropriate serving

requirements. These requirements are not district preferences or an attempt to take food away from students. They are federal and state program rules that all participating school meal programs must follow.

At the same time, our commitment is to feed students well within those guidelines. Last year, we increased portion sizes where applicable and allowable within compliance, and we will continue to do so whenever possible. When the regulations allow us to offer a larger portion, a heartier scratch recipe, more local produce, or a better-balanced plate, we will. Our focus is to meet the requirements while making meals as generous, satisfying, nutrient-dense, and student-friendly as possible.

Eat Local, Eat Well: Our 30% NY Initiative

Pine Plains CSD will continue to expand local procurement through the 30% NY Initiative, which supports schools that source at least 30% of lunch ingredients from New York State farms and producers. This work keeps more food dollars in New York, supports local agriculture, and gives students the chance to experience food grown, raised, milled, baked, and produced closer to home.

Current and developing partners include:

- Cornell Cooperative Extension - 30% NY Farm to School Initiative support
- Milestone Mills - local flour, cornmeal, bread products, and tortilla chips
- Bread Alone Bakery - local whole wheat bread
- Red Barn Provisions and Red Barn Produce - local NY products, produce, and meats
- Slate Foods - local NY products and beef
- Morning Star Poultry - local poultry
- Hudson Harvest - local NY produce
- Dagele Brothers - local NY and U.S. produce
- Hudson Valley Egg - local eggs
- Hudson Valley Fresh - local milk
- Hudson Valley Fishery - local steelhead trout
- Happy Valley Meat - local beef
- Highland Farm - venison, game meats, and ostrich eggs
- The Chef's Garden - regeneratively grown specialty vegetables and herbs

Vendor availability may change by season, harvest, procurement requirements, and product availability. Our commitment is to continue building relationships that bring more New York food into our cafeterias in a responsible and sustainable way.

Scratch Cooking, BBQ, Farm-to-Table Meals, and Whole-Animal Education

This year, students will see more scratch-cooked meals, house-made sauces, seasonal sides, BBQ-inspired menus, and farm-to-table recipes developed specifically for our district. We will continue expanding high-quality proteins, including beef, chicken, pork, venison, duck, game, and fish, as availability, menu requirements, and procurement guidelines allow.

We are also exploring more whole-animal and large-primal procurement, along with age-appropriate butchery demonstrations and educational opportunities. These experiences help students understand where food comes from, how skilled food professionals reduce waste, and why respect for ingredients matters. All purchasing, preparation, and service will remain aligned with school nutrition, food safety, and procurement requirements.

Bioenergetics and Student Wellness

In addition to sourcing quality ingredients and cooking from scratch, Pine Plains CSD will continue using a thoughtful, science-informed approach to menu design. One framework we use is bioenergetics, which looks at how the body processes and uses energy from food and how different food combinations can support nutrient absorption, steady energy, and overall wellness.

For example, pairing vitamin C-rich fruits or vegetables with iron-rich greens or grains can help support iron absorption. Including healthy fats with vegetables can help the body use fat-soluble vitamins such as A, D, E, and K. Balancing carbohydrates with protein and fiber can help students feel energized and ready to learn throughout the school day.

We do not make medical claims or provide dietary advice. Rather, we use these principles as one more tool to design meals that are flavorful, balanced, purposeful, and supportive of the school day.

Find Your Focus in Our Kitchens

This year we will also integrate the Find Your Focus program into our kitchens as part of our mission, motto, and daily operating culture. Our guiding pillars are:

- Precision
- Purpose
- Passion
- Pacing
- Presence
- Personal Growth
- Persistence
- Patience
- Perspective

For our food service team, these words are more than a slogan. They remind us to work with precision, cook with purpose, serve with presence, improve with patience, and keep perspective on why this work matters. Every meal is an opportunity to care for students, support families, and strengthen the Pine Plains community.

Continuing to Build Something Different

We will continue to work closely with New York State Education Department Child Nutrition, the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, Cornell Farm to School, and professional culinary partners including The Culinary Institute of America. Through guidance, training, collaboration, and continued improvement, our goal is to build a program that Pine Plains families can be proud of and that helps set a higher standard for what school food can be.

We encourage families to have their children participate regularly in school breakfast and lunch. School meals are an investment in student health, learning, belonging, and community. Thank you for supporting the continued growth of food service in Pine Plains.

Thank You,

Michael Angelo Dandola, C.I.A. '13

Food Service Director

Pine Plains Central School District

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