

Practical Strategies for Helping New Yorkers Not Go Hungry *Without any Additional Costs to New York City*

February 2021 Update

“People don't eat in the long run. They eat every day.”¹

SUMMARY: On February 10, the Mayor's Office issued a press release announcing that the *GetFoodNYC* program had reached the 200 million meals distributed mark since COVID Pandemic began². It's a huge accomplishment that has helped hundreds of thousands of hunger vulnerable New Yorkers. However, one piece of information was missing from the press release: a breakdown between the two programs: school based and emergency home delivery meals. This update, based on the first five months of the school year, focuses on the NYC-Department of Education (NYC-DOE) grab and go meals program and its potential for combatting hunger insecurity.

- ❖ A survey conducted last August showed that half of NYC-DOE school parents were skipping meals³.
- ❖ The money for the NYC-DOE school meals comes from the Federal government; the spending pattern that began last spring continued into the new school year with around \$38 million sitting on the table unspent each month.
- ❖ For the month of October, only about 18% of all public school low-income children were benefitting from the NYC-DOE school meals program (both grab/go and in person meals).
- ❖ NYC-DOE school lunches dropped by 74% from pre-COVID-19 (October 2019 vs October 2020).
- ❖ Since COVID-19 Pandemic began, the Los Angeles School District has given out nearly twice as many meals as NYC.
- ❖ GREAT NEWS! The NYC-DOE finally started offering a mix of hot and cold meals this past January. But there has been zero publicity. What's needed now is a strong publicity campaign to get the word out.
- ❖ Both Los Angeles and Chicago school districts provide a menu with a different breakfast, lunch and supper each day. If the second and third largest school districts can do this, why can't New York City?
- ❖ To ensure accountability, the NYC-DOE should start providing monthly reports on meal participation.

¹ Quote from Harry Hopkins, New Deal programs architect and senior aide to President Franklin Roosevelt, including setting up and running Works Progress Administration (WPA).

² [New York City Passes 200 Million Meals Distributed Through GetFoodNYC Emergency Programs | City of New York](https://www.cityofnewyork.org/press-releases/new-york-city-passes-200-million-meals-distributed-through-getfoodnyc-emergency-programs)

³ <https://newyork.edtrust.org/press-release/poll-half-of-nyc-parents-have-skipped-reduced-meals-for-their-family-and-62-are-concerned-about-their-childs-access-to-food-this-fall/>

1. *GetFoodNYC* passes the 200 million meals mark. Front line food service workers deserve much praise for this huge accomplishment. However, missing from this figure is the breakdown between school based and emergency seniors/homebound meals.

On February 10, the Mayor’s Office issued a press release announcing that the *GetFoodNYC* Program passed the 200 million meals mark since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

“As part of Mayor de Blasio’s [FeedingNYC](#) pandemic response plan, the City created a number of programs, most visibly free Grab & Go meals at hundreds of Department of Education sites across the city, provided without the need for sign-up or identification, and Emergency Home Food Delivery for people who, due to a combination of health and economic factors, cannot go out, have no one to go out for them, and cannot afford private delivery options. These programs, which continue operating today, distributed the bulk of the 200 million meals.”⁴

While there is plenty of credit for City officials to share, the thousands of NYC-DOE front line food preparation and distribution workers certainly deserve much praise. They are part of the heroes army that got NYC through the worst months of the Pandemic. However, big parts of the *GetFoodNYC* meals story were left out of the City press release. The *GetFoodNYC* meals program has two separate parts. One program, school building based grab and go meals, administered by the NYC-Department of Education, is open to anyone. The other program, administered through the Department of Sanitation, is restricted to the elderly and households that cannot leave their homes to pick up the meals or shop. This report offers an analysis based on the actual school meals program data that is missing in the press release.

2. The need for a school building based grab and go meals continues to be great: a survey conducted this past summer found that half of New York City public school parents say they skipped or reduced their family’s meals as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic, anti-hunger organizations have been alerting the public about the hardships that hundreds of thousands of families are struggling with. Last summer a survey of NYC public school parents was commissioned by the Education Trust-New York to determine how widespread was the problem of hunger insecurity. According to the survey, more than half of all public school parents had skipped or reduced their daily meals:

“NEW YORK – Half of New York City public school parents say they have skipped or reduced their family’s meals as a result of the coronavirus pandemic and even more parents are concerned about their child’s food access when school begins, according to a new poll commissioned by The Education Trust–New York – even as New York City leaders have quickly scaled and implemented a massive effort since March to get food to New Yorkers in need.

These staggering statistics underscore the need for city leaders to continue these efforts and to prioritize food access for children this fall. **Community Food Advocates, The Education Trust–New York, Hunger Free America, and United Way of New York City** today called on City leaders to describe the school meal distribution plan for New York City’s 1.1 million students and ensure robust outreach and communication so parents understand how they will be able to consistently and securely access food for their children this school year.”⁵

The organizations included a request with four urgent recommendations for the NYC-DOE Office of School Food and Nutrition Services to give serious consideration to as the new school year was about to begin (see 11 below for the four recommendations).

⁴ [New York City Passes 200 Million Meals Distributed Through GetFoodNYC Emergency Programs | City of New York](#)

⁵ <https://newyork.edtrust.org/press-release/poll-half-of-nyc-parents-have-skipped-reduced-meals-for-their-family-and-62-are-concerned-about-their-childs-access-to-food-this-fall/>

3. For the new school year 2020-21, for the month of October, there was a large decrease of 74% in the number of meals served/taken between pre-COVID-19 and COVID-19

Across the country, many school districts saw a drop in meals participation since the COVID-19 Pandemic began. For NYC-DOE meals program, there was a large decrease of 74% in the number of meals served/taken between pre-COVID-19 and COVID-19.⁶ The chart below is a comparison of lunch meals served/taken in October 2019 and October 2020.

Lunch Meals Served	October 2019	October 2020	Difference	
			Number	Percentage
Lunch Meals Served	12,752,458	3,242,778	-9,509,680	-74%

Income support too: Free school meals is both a nutrition and an income support program. A family with two children can potentially save around \$350 a month based on meals picked up from the NYC-DOE grab and go sites. This is a savings that can be spent by families on other necessities of life such as rent and utilities.

4. For school year 2020-21, the NYC-DOE school meals program is leaving around \$40 million unspent each month. Unless new strategies are tried, such as what's working in other school districts, \$400 million will be left on the table by end of the school year.

Our [Practical Strategies for Helping New Yorkers Not Go Hungry](#) position paper, issued last September, included the warning that “unless significant changes are made, for school year 2020-21, the NYC-DOE will end up leaving hundreds of millions of dollars on the table in unspent Federal funds during the greatest hunger crisis since the Great Depression”. Unfortunately, for the first four months of school year, 2020-21, the NYC-DOE continued to serve same menu of cold sandwiches. Without any change in strategy, this warning has proven true. The chart below shows that the DOE is only getting reimbursed for around \$19.8 million a month as compared with \$58 million pre-COVID-19. Around \$38 million is being left on the table each month that could be spent on combatting child hunger insecurity by simply feeding kids.

NYC-DOE Free School Meals Programs	October 2019 ⁷	October 2020 ⁸	Dollars Not Spent
Lunch Meals Reimbursement	\$44,633,518	\$19,816,505	
breakfast meals reimbursement	\$13,401,945		
Total	\$58,035,463	\$19,816,505	\$38,218,958

⁶ NYSED-Child Nutrition ADP Report for October 2019. The October 2020 meals count is from NYSED in an email to Susan Edelman, NY Post Reporter.

⁷ Reimbursement from the Federal Government: Lunch is reimbursed at \$3.50 and breakfast at \$2.20. NYSED provides a small reimbursement of .06 per meal. Source: [New York State Education Department Child Nutrition Management](#).

⁸ NYSED End of Year Report Summer Food Service Program for October

Great News! Starting in January, the NYC-DOE launched a new menu with more choices including hot and cold meals.

5. Based on September and October, only 19% of 821,000 NYC-DOE low-income children are taking the meals. This figure includes both “in person” and “remote” learning students.

There has been little change from last spring for the number of low-income children benefiting from the NYC-DOE meals program. According to data provided by the New York State Education Department, October 2020 had a daily average of 154,380 lunches⁹. According to its Demographic Snapshot profile 2020, the NYC-DOE has a total population of 821,000 low-income students. Based on these figures, a total of only 19% of all low-income children are benefitting from the National School Lunch Program.¹⁰

October 2020 Lunch Participation	NYC-DOE Low Income Students	% of Low Income students participating in meals program
154,380 lunch meals	821,000	19%

6. Since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Los Angeles has given out nearly twice as many meals as New York City.

On February 1, [Los Angeles Unified School District](#) proudly announced that it had served 100 million meals since the start of COVID-19. This impressive milestone was widely covered in the local print and TV media.¹¹ A few weeks earlier, as of January 22, the NYC-DOE said that it served 80 million meals¹² (the meals number covers both children and adults). New York City and Los Angeles are the first and second largest school districts in the country.¹³ While both figures are impressive accomplishments, it’s clear that there is much more demand for the Los Angeles meals than the NYC-DOE meals. This is not surprising when the weekly menus are compared with each other. Los Angeles has been offering a mostly hot

Rank	School District	Student Enrollment	Meals Served	Meals served per student
1	New York City Department of Education	989,012	80 million as January 22, 2021	80 meals
2	Los Angeles Unified School District	653,826	100 million as of Feb. 1, 2021	153 meals

⁹ New York State Education Department email to Susan Edelman, NY Post reporter.

¹⁰ <https://infohub.nyced.org/reports/school-quality/information-and-data-overview>

¹¹ <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/lausd-served-100-million-meals-to-students-community-during-covid-19-pandemic-district-announces/ar-BB1dixP1?ocid=uxbndfbing> ; <https://www.dailynews.com/2021/02/01/lausd-hands-out-100-millionth-meal-since-the-pandemic-shuttered-schools/>

¹² Email from NYC-DOE to Susan Edelman, NY Post reporter

¹³ Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

meals (heated up at home) with many ethnic recipes on the menu. A simple math formula, dividing the number of meals by the number of students to arrive at the number of meals per student, offers the following results: **80 meals per NYC student vs. 153 meals per Los Angeles student** (the total number of meals served includes both adults and children; to arrive at a comparison, total student enrollment was used).

Sample Los Angeles Unified School District breakfast, lunch and supper menu

 NOVEMBER 2020 - Menus 11/09-11/13 <small>MENUS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE</small>				
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
B R E A K F A S T				
11-09 Deluxe Cereal Bowl - V Fresh Fruit Got Milk	11-10 Turkey Ham & Cheese on Hawaiian Bun Fresh Fruit Got Milk	11-11 Cinnamon French Toast - V Fresh Apple Slices Got Milk	11-12 WG Strawberry Pocket - V Banana Got Milk	11-13 Manager's Choice Fresh Apple Slices Got Milk
L U N C H				
11-09 Hot & Spicy Chicken Sandwich Ruffle Fries Paradise Punch Slush Got Milk	11-10 Zesty Beef Chalupa Cabbage & Kale Salad Applesauce Cup Got Milk	11-11 WG Pepperoni Pizza Celery sticks Frozen Strawberry Cup Got Milk	11-12 Bean & Cheese Chimichanga Salsa Cup Sour Watermelon Cup Got Milk	11-13 Asian Chicken Bites with Rice & Broccoli Strawberry Kiwi Fruit Slush Got Milk
S U P P E R				
11-09 New! BBQ Pork Burrito Baby Carrots Mixed Fruit Cup Got Milk	11-10 Chicken Drumstick & Corn Crackers Frozen Mixed Berry Pop Got Milk	11-11 Turkey Stick Hummus Cup Crunch & Crave Crackers Cherry Smooth Cup Fresh Fruit Got Milk	11-12 Chicken Tenders and Tots Mixed Fruit Cup Got Milk	11-13 Sunbutter & Jelly Sandwich Paradise Punch Vegetable Juice Fresh Fruit Got Milk

7. NYC-DOE began offering a weekly menu with both cold and hot meals in January 2021. Hopefully, this improved menu selection will start pushing meal participation up.

Since COVID-19 Pandemic began last March, thousands of school districts, across the country, have been working hard to offer a grab and go breakfast and lunch menu that kids will want to eat. With the constraints and challenges of COVID-19, this meant getting inventive and resourceful. By the beginning the 2020-21 school year, 24 out of 25 of the largest school districts all offered a weekly mix of hot and cold meals (the hot meals are picked up and reheated at home). For the first 10 months of the Pandemic, with the exception of adding pizza to the menu for the months of July and August, and holiday meals for Thanksgiving and Christmas, the NYC-DOE meals program consisted of a mix of cold sandwiches. In November, we alerted over 40 NYC stakeholders including elected officials, government agencies and advocacy organizations to this fact (see appendix) with several emails. With a push for hot meals from New York Council Member Mark Treyger's office, the NYC started to recalibrate its meals program¹⁴. In

¹⁴ [Councilman Mark Treyger calls on NYC to serve hot meals at public schools - New York Daily News \(nydailynews.com\)](https://www.nydailynews.com/news/politics/govt/councilman-mark-treyger-calls-on-nyc-to-serve-hot-meals-at-public-schools-article-ab311111-11-2020.html)

January, NYC-DOE began its own mix of hot and cold lunch selection. The new lunch menu offers a variety of meals including: chicken with vegetable rice, panini sandwich, popcorn chicken wrap, southwest burrito and chicken dumplings with vegetable rice. This is great news; hopefully the meals taken each day (in person and remote learning) will start to get closer to pre-COVID-19 numbers.

8. Since the new DOE menu first appeared in early January, there has been zero publicity so families will know about the change. Why not use the LINK NYC kiosks?

While these new hot meals menu offerings are a great addition for the families that rely on the school free breakfast and lunch program, there has been zero publicity from the NYC-DOE. Other school districts publicize the grab and go meals program through local media, social media and posting attractive menus on their websites. NYC-DOE does not do these obviously important things. All the NYC-DOE has to do now is get the word out so that meal participation will start increasing. Here is an easy to do recommendation that could get the word to almost all NYC families in less than 24 hours.



LINK NYC FREE ADVERTISING: Using the [LINK NYC](#) internet kiosks, with over 1,000 locations, in every neighborhood, the NYC-DOE could get the hot meals word out by tomorrow morning. The NYC kiosks, as the attached two pictures show, advertise 24 hours a day, with NYC government sponsored notices including these two examples: one telling people where a nearby pantry is and the other (NYC-DOH) reminding everyone to wash their hands.

9. For the new school year 2020-21, other school districts trying new strategies are seeing more families picking up the meals for their children.

Other school districts are offering grab and go meals resulting in high student participation. Prince William County School District in Virginia, Minneapolis and St. Paul school districts have all shown that bulk food boxes (with four to seven day's worth of meals with one pick up) can make a big difference in increasing student/family participation.

- **Prince William County School District (PWCS):**

Last spring, during the COVID-19 shut down, PWCS in the Virginia suburbs outside Washington DC, was serving around at most 10,000 meals a day or 50,000 grab and go meals a week. This was down from 60,000 meals a day pre-COVID-19. Faced with the huge drop in meals



participation, the PWCS Nutrition Team decided to try a new strategy approved last spring in a [USDA-FNS waiver](#). The waiver allows school districts to give out bulk food packages (which can include milk, rice, beans, pasta, bread, vegetables and fresh fruit) instead of individual meals. PWCS began the school year in September by giving families grocery bag kits of food staples. Each grocery bag is measured to be equivalent to five-day worth of breakfast and lunch meals. The new strategy worked better than anyone expected. Participation is back up to pre-COVID-19 levels. The School Nutrition director, Adam Russo, received a national award for this innovative and successful strategy.¹⁵

" Before COVID-19, we were serving 60,000 lunches a day. After March 16, we were serving meals every day at 22 locations, and we were only serving about 3,000 meals. So, we went down quite a bit," he said. "It's tough. Believe me, in our office and out in the field, it's all we talk about. How do we get more to come? How do we get them to come out? "During the summer months, Prince William County Public Schools continued providing two meals a day, every day of the week. Then Russo decided to make some adjustments as the new school year got underway this week. "To support our students learning at home, we've set up 56 curbside location where we're now actually handing out grocery kits to families," said Russo. "So, loaves of bread, tortillas, pints of cherry tomatoes, whole fruits, vegetables, blocks of cheese that are already sliced for them, to use as they see fit." ¹⁶

Prince William County School District (90,000 Students) ¹⁷	
Comparison of Grab and Go Meals vs. Grocery kits/meals	Average # of meals served weekly
Pre-COVID-19	300,000
Grab and Go Meals: April and May 2020	50,000
Grocery kits of food: September to November 13, 2020	340,000

- **Oakland Unified School District** is trying to reverse big drop in meals participation with grocery staples instead of just prepared meals:



Last October, Oakland California School District decided it needed to do something serious about the low participation in its grab and go meals program. It began a home delivery program with food that families could prepare themselves.

“And new offerings are in the works. The district is in the midst of launching OUSD Eats, a home delivery service **focusing on grocery staples instead of complete meals**. “To get a bag full of manufactured pizzas and burgers and things that manufacturers actually produce for school lunch programs, it’s not quite as desirable for families as it would be to have a whole melon or tortillas with taco meat and cheese,” Reynolds says. Families who enroll in the program receive a week’s worth of food at a time.”¹⁸

¹⁵ <https://princewilliamliving.com/pwcs-foodservices-director-receives-leadership-award/>

¹⁶ <https://wila.com/news/local/weekly-grocery-kits-available-for-families-with-kids-in-prince-william-co-public-schools>

¹⁷ PWCS-D Nutrition Services Office sent email with school meals data to the author

¹⁸ <https://www.food-management.com/k-12-schools/oakland-unified-school-district-navigates-school-meal-participation-challenges>

- **Minneapolis and St. Paul Minnesota School Districts** have also been using the **USDA-FNS waiver approved bulk food option:**

Both Minneapolis and St. Paul provide families with seven day’s worth of food. Each week the menu changes with items that will have strong appeal to young eaters.



Free Meal Boxes for All Youth

All families are invited to pick up free meal boxes for their children. Meal boxes contain a week’s worth of breakfasts, lunches, and snacks and meet Minneapolis Public Schools Culinary & Wellness Services’ high standards for nutrition and quality ingredients.

Minneapolis Public Schools



St. Paul Public Schools

- **Philadelphia Public Schools:** Faced with a decline in meals served, Philadelphia changed course last December and came up with four different menus that could be picked up in a box with seven days worth of meals including fresh vegetables and fruit.¹⁹

“The “Grab-and-Go” meal kits contain seven breakfasts and seven lunches. Meals can be stored in a freezer until



students are ready to heat and eat. Weekly menus include pantry staples like cereals, breakfast bars, pancakes, and muffins, along with common school lunch items, such as whole-grain chicken nuggets, four-cheese panini

sandwiches, bean and cheese burritos and macaroni and cheese. All meal kits include milk, vegetables, and fresh fruit.”

Grab-n-go LOVE Box			
Monday	 <p>FROSTED FLAKES APPLE BAR CRAISINS ORANGE JUICE</p>	 <p>BEAN & CHEESE BURRITO SALSA CUP CORN MIXED FRUIT CUP</p>	
Tuesday	 <p>TURKEY-HAM & CHEESE ON ENGLISH MUFFIN PINEAPPLE TIDBITS GRAPE JUICE</p>	 <p>KICKIN' CHICKEN PATTY HAMBURGER BUN POTATO WEDGES ORANGE JUICE</p>	
Wednesday	 <p>FROOT LOOPS GRAHAM CRACKERS PEAR CUP APPLE-CRAN JUICE</p>	 <p>GENERAL TSO'S CHICKEN & NOODLES BROCCOLI PEACH CUP CHOCOLATE COOKIE</p>	
Thursday	 <p>PILLSBURY GRAPE CRESCENT PEACH CUP FRUIT PUNCH</p>	 <p>CHICKEN STRIPS W/MAC & CHEESE BAKED BEANS SUN SPLASH VEG. JUICE PEAR CUP APPLESAUCE</p>	
Friday	 <p>BANANA MUFFIN STRING CHEESE MIXED FRUIT CUP GRAPE JUICE</p>	 <p>HERO SANDWICH MUSTARD COUNTRY-BLEND VEGETABLES PINEAPPLE CUP</p>	

Heating Instructions and Nutritional Information is included in every box
Milk is provided for all meals
Substitutions may be made to some items

¹⁹ <https://www.philasd.org/blog/tag/grab-and-go-meal-distribution/>

- **Orange County/Orlando Public Schools:** During August the number meals served was about 50% lower than the previous year, but that improved to 25% lower in September, when FNS started serving supper and snack to go along with curbside meal distribution of a week's worth of meals, including breakfast, lunch and snack for the weekend, on Mondays. By October, the number of meals served was about equal to the number served in the prior year and the counts were expected to improve in further in January, when the district planned to add weekend supper to the Monday curbside meal distribution program, as well as weekend meals for in-person learners.²⁰

10. If kids liked and ate the free school breakfast and lunch meals, parents would not have to wait hours in long lines at the neighborhood food pantries. That's how the USDA-FNS child nutrition government programs are intended to work.

On October 22, the New York Times ran a two full pages story on food pantries reporting that *"1.5 million New Yorkers can't afford food. Pantries are their lifeline"*²¹ In November, the Robin Hood Foundation issued a report on food hardship in NYC. The Report focused mostly on food pantries including the following piece of data: "In September and October of 2020, 32% of adults reported that they used a food pantry at least once in the 12 months prior, an increase of more than 250% relative to January and February".²² Since the start of the Pandemic, the NYC food banks and community pantries network has been doing everything possible to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 hunger crisis. They are also heroes of the Pandemic. Yet, these organizations do not begin to have the financial resources when compared with the [USDA-FNS Child Nutrition Programs](#) (which includes School Breakfast, Lunch, Snack and a Supper meal). The total operating budget for the two main food pantry programs, City Harvest and Food Bank, in 2019 was around \$216 million or about \$18 million per month. Based on the Federal regulations, the NYC-DOE is entitled to spend at least \$80 million per month for child breakfast, lunch and snacks or \$960 million for 12 months. The school breakfast, lunch, snacks and after school dinner are the programs (along with SNAP and WIC) intended by the Federal Government to directly keep children fed with nutritious meals so they can learn and thrive. Our own informal estimate is that for every 15 news articles about scramble to secure enough food to meet demand, the long lines at the food banks and pantries, there is one article about how school districts and families are meeting the hunger crisis with the grab and go meals programs.

11. When it comes to combatting child hunger, the spotlight should be on improving programs with the most Federal funding. In the Second Stimulus Bill, \$22.8 billion went for school meals vs. \$1.8 billion for country's network of food banks and pantries.

In the Second Stimulus bill (Consolidated Appropriations Act) passed on December 27, 2020, the Federally funded school breakfast, lunch and afterschool programs have been guaranteed as much money as needed so that ALL low income children can get nutritious meals during the COVID-19 Pandemic. This means billions of dollars. A USDA waiver now allows **ANY** child to benefit not just low-income children which is in effect until June 30, 2021. The USDA-The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) program for food banks and

²⁰ [Food Management January 20, 2021](#)

²¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/10/20/nyregion/nyc-food-banks.html>

²² [Food Hardship in New York City is rising as New Yorkers wait for a second stimulus bill. November 2020. Robin Hood Foundation](#)

pantries is only getting a \$400 million boost. Given the spending rate, the \$400 will only cover barely one month. The Federal Farmers to Families food box program which had received \$4 billion this year, ended up getting zero dollars in the Second Stimulus bill. USDA just agreed to another \$1.4 billion.²³

USDA-FNS School Meals Programs	Annual FY 2019	Second Stimulus Bill 2021
National School Lunch	14,000,000,000	As much funding is needed to meet demand
Breakfast	4,500,000,000	
Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)	3,700,000,000	
Snacks	200,000,000	
Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)	481,000,000	
Total	22,881,000,000	

Source: US Department of Agriculture

USDA Programs for Food Banks and Pantries	COVID-19: March to December 2020	2021
The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)	350,000,000	400,000,000
Farmers to Families Food Box Program	4,134,000,000	1,400,000,000
Total	4,484,000,000	1,800,000,000

Source: US Department of Agriculture

In the Second Stimulus Bill passed this past December, the USDA is allocating only \$400 million for the Food Banks through its TEFAP program and another \$1.4 billion for the Farmers to Families. **The big bucks remain with the school run child nutrition programs.** The bill has language ensuring that there will be enough funding so that all school children (not just low income) can receive two nutritious meals a day plus a snack. It's actually three meals a day when the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) program is included. Last year, USDA had a budget of \$22.8 billion for the school meals programs. **\$22.8 billion vs. \$1.8 billion.** *Since the COVID-19 Pandemic will continue for most of 2021, hunger prevention awareness efforts should be directed as much at the school child nutrition programs as they are for food banks and pantries.*

- 12. It's February and there are still five more months before the end of school year. July and August will face same issues. Seven more months of *grab and go*. To ensure accountability, the NYC-DOE should issue progress reports tracking number of meals taken.**

Almost every day another article is reporting about the hunger crisis in New York City. Yet the NYC-DOE Office of the School Food and Nutrition Services, which is the biggest source of funding and responsibility for combatting the hunger crisis, has received little scrutiny so far. Nor has it issued any progress report

²³ SEC. 722. EMERGENCY COSTS FOR CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC. Provides emergency relief to help school meal and child and adult care food programs, which are in dire need of financial assistance, to continue serving children and families. **Provides as much funding as necessary to carry out these payments.**

SEC. 711. EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM. Invests **\$400 million in the Emergency Food Assistance Program** through September 30, 2021. Allows up to 20 percent of these funds to be used for commodity distribution. Source: **H.R. 133 DIVISION-BY-DIVISION SUMMARY OF COVID-19 RELIEF PROVISIONS**

with data showing number of school breakfast and lunch meals taken since the COVID-19 crisis began last March. We know less meals are being taken, what no one knows is how big a drop has occurred compared with pre-COVID-19.

The NYC-DOE Office of School Food and Nutrition must be held to a much higher level of scrutiny and accountability. Now that the NYC-DOE has changed its menu and is offering a mix of hot meals along with the cold sandwiches (the hot meals are heated up at home), it should also begin issuing a COVID-19 school meals progress report documenting the following Grab and Go meals tracking issues.

- Average daily meals participation (reported on a weekly basis) for school year 2020-21.
- Total number of meals served each month.
- efforts at increasing publicity about Grab and Go meals.

Education Trust-New York, United way of New York City, Hunger Free America and Community Food Advocates of New York recommendations to the NYC-DOE: Here are four recommendations sent to the NYC-DOE, in a policy letter from Education Trust-New York, United way of New York City, Hunger Free America and Community Food Advocates of New York (posted online on August 29,2020).²⁴

“The four anti-hunger and education organizations call on city leaders to share how the school meal distribution plan for each community school district for the fall will distribute meals to families from low-income backgrounds and address needs that were highlighted in the poll, including:

- How families will be informed, in their home language, about ways to access school meals this fall, including the additional support available if they are not able to pick up meals at a designated school site.
- How breakfast and lunch will be distributed to students who are not attending school in-person either because they are participating in blended learning or fully remote learning – including both through grab-and-go meals at schools and other sites and, for families who are not able to pick up meals, alternative distribution and partnerships with community-based organizations.
- How the nutrition needs of families who have been most impacted by the pandemic will be prioritized – particularly Black, Latinx, and low-income families who are experiencing food insecurity at disproportionate rates – including incorporating the most food insecure students, including all students in temporary housing, in the City’s existing meal delivery program.
- A commitment to full transparency by providing monthly data, disaggregated by community school district and by race/ethnicity, income, and housing status, so the public, advocates and community-based organizations can see whether school meal distribution targets are being met and support families with referrals to city resources.

²⁴ <https://newyork.edtrust.org/press-release/poll-half-of-nyc-parents-have-skipped-reduced-meals-for-their-family-and-62-are-concerned-about-their-childs-access-to-food-this-fall/>

13. What about an after-school dinner meal option (CACFP)? If Los Angeles and Chicago can do it, why can't New York City?

The USDA-FNS also operates a third meal (dinner) program through what is known as Child and Adult Care Food Program-At Risk After School (CACFP). The NYC-DOE grab and go does not offer a separate prepared third meal. Parents can pick up two sandwiches instead of one. The next two largest school districts, Los Angeles, both offer a menu with changing meals for breakfast, lunch AND dinner. What this means is that a child can actually have a lunch and dinner each day with a different menu. For example, here are sample menus from Los Angeles Unified School District and Chicago Public Schools showing a breakfast, lunch and dinner meals with many hot and cold choices.

Los Angeles Unified School District

 JANUARY 2021 - Menus 01/25-01/29 <small>MENUS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE</small>				
MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
B R E A K F A S T				
01-25 Buttery Maple Waffle - V Fresh Fruit Got Milk	01-26 Fiesta Bean & Cheese Burrito - V Fresh Apple Slices Got Milk	01-27 Beef Sausage Pancake Sandwich Fresh Fruit Got Milk	01-28 Manager's Choice Fresh Apple Slices Got Milk	01-29 Deluxe Cereal Bowl - V Fresh Banana Got Milk
L U N C H				
01-25 Bean & Cheese Chimichanga - V Salsa Cup Perfect Pears Kettle Popcorn Got Milk	01-26 BBQ Beef Rib Sandwich Mini Potato Tots Mixed Berry Pop Got Milk	01-27 WG Pepperoni Pizza Wedge Petite Baby Carrots Hula Cooler Slush Got Milk	01-28 Cheeseburger Sliders Celery Sticks Sour Watermelon Cup Got Milk	01-29 Sunbutter Meal Kit (Kit Content: Sunbutter, Honey Graham Crackers, Vegetable Juice, Raisins) Got Milk
S U P P E R				
01-25 WG Cheese Pizza - V Petite Baby Carrots Very Berry Juice Got Milk	01-26 Cheesy Pillow Marinara Cup Fresh Fruit Brownie Got Milk	01-27 Chicken Drumstick & Ruffle Fries Fritos Corn Chips Fresh Fruit Got Milk	01-28 Pork Chop & Mashed Potatoes Applesauce Cup Churro Got Milk	01-29 Grilled Chicken Sandwich Berry Berry Blue Slush Fresh Fruit Chocolate Chip Cookie Got Milk

Chicago Public Schools: The third largest school district, [Chicago Public Schools](https://www.chicago.gov/cps), also serves three different meals each day including a third or supper meal. [february_2021_menu.pdf \(cps.edu\)](https://www.cps.edu/february_2021_menu.pdf)

NOVEMBER 2020 MENU					
AFTERSCHOOL SUPPER					
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Week of November 2	Cheese Stick (v) with Marinara Sauce Baby Carrots Dried Cranberries Milk Selection 	Election Day No Classes	Chicken Patty Sandwich Celery Sticks Pear Milk Selection 	Chicken-Ham & Cheese Sandwich Fresh Broccoli Apple Slices Milk Selection 	School Improvement Day No Classes
Week of November 9	SunButter & Jelly Sandwich (v) Fresh Broccoli Pear Milk Selection 	BBQ Chicken- Meatball Sub Baby Carrots Apple Milk Selection 	Hamburger Celery Dried Cranberries Milk Selection 	Hot Dog Green Beans (Local) Orange Milk Selection 	Chicken-Ham & Cheese Sandwich Fresh Broccoli Apple Slices Milk Selection 
Week of November 16	Hard Boiled Egg (v) Cheddar Cheese Cubes Pretzel Goldfish Crackers Baby Carrots • Pear Milk Selection 	Hot Dog Fresh Broccoli Dried Cranberries Milk Selection 	Hamburger Celery Sticks Orange Milk Selection 	BBQ Chicken- Meatball Sub Emoji Potatoes (Local) Apple Slices Milk Selection 	Cheese Pizza (v) Fresh Broccoli Dried Cranberries Milk Selection 

Appendix:

The policy alert and chart below was circulated by email in November 2020 to over 40 NYC stakeholders including elected officials, government agencies and anti-hunger advocacy organizations.

A big high five to Mayor de Blasio for announcing that our elementary schools will reopen on December 7th. However, at least 700,000 DOE students will still be learning remote. Children need to eat well to learn well. Nine months into COVID-19, day after day, week after week, the NYC-DOE school grab and go meals program is serving the same cold sandwiches. Is it any wonder participation is so low.

NYC-DOE is the **only** large school district in the country that does **NOT** offer “grab and go” hot meals to remote learning students.

Rank	Name of School District	State	Student Enrollment	Grab and Go Hot Meals Offered
1	New York City Department of Education	NY	989,012	NO
2	Los Angeles Unified	CA	653,826	Yes
3	City of Chicago (SD 299)	IL	396,641	Yes
4	Dade County	FL	356,233	Yes
5	Clark County (Las Vegas)	NV	320,532	Yes
6	Broward County	FL	262,666	Yes
7	Houston ISD	TX	211,552	Yes
8	Hillsborough County (Tampa)	FL	203,439	yes
9	Orange County (Orlando)	FL	187,092	Yes
10	Hawaii Department of Education	HI	186,825	Yes
11	Fairfax County	VA	183,417	Yes
12	Palm Beach County	FL	182,895	Yes
13	Gwinnett County (Atlanta)	GA	169,150	Yes
14	Dallas ISD	TX	159,713	Yes
15	Wake County (Raleigh)	NC	153,534	Yes

16	Montgomery County	MD	151,295	Yes
17	Shelby County (Memphis)	TN	149,832	Yes
18	Charlotte-Mecklenburg	NC	142,991	Yes
19	Philadelphia City	PA	137,674	Yes
20	San Diego Unified	CA	130,303	Yes
21	Duval County (Jacksonville)	FL	127,653	Yes
22	Prince George's County	MD	125,136	Yes
23	Cypress-Fairbanks ISD (Houston)	TX	111,440	Yes
24	Cobb County (Atlanta)	GA	110,001	Yes
25	Baltimore County	MD	108,191	Yes

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Every school district website posts the monthly school breakfast and lunch menu. Hot meals are heated up at home using either a microwave or oven. School districts are required by USDA-FNS regulations to provide each family with written heating instructions in English and Spanish (and other languages spoken) for each meal.

The [Practical Strategies for Helping New Yorkers Not Go Hungry Without any Additional Costs to New York City](#) report was shared with the following government agencies, elected officials and policy organizations. I am grateful for the comments and positive feedback I received from government agencies, elected officials and advocacy organizations.

- US Dept of Agriculture-Food and Nutrition Services
- New York State Education Department-Child Nutrition
- NYC Mayor's Office of Food Policy
- New York City Office of the Comptroller
- New York City Council-Office of the Speaker
- Mark Treyger, Education Chair, New York City Council
- NYC-DOE Office of School Food and Nutrition Services
- NYC Independent Budget Office
- NYC Office of the Public Advocate
- Food Bank of New York City
- Hunger Free America
- City Harvest
- Hunger Solutions New York State
- National Farm to School Network
- Community Food Advocates New York City
- Feeding America
- No Kid Hungry

- No Kid Hungry-New York
- Laurie Tisch Center for Food, Education and Policy at Columbia University
- CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute
- New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College
- BronxWorks
- Food Action Research Group (FRAC)
- Urban Institute
- Brookings Institute
- Urban School Food Alliance
- Advocates for Children New York City
- New School Center for NYC Affairs/Inside Schools
- School Nutrition Association
- Advocates for Children New York City
- Center for Budget and Public Policy
- Manhattan Institute
- New York City Partnership
- Citizens Budget Commission
- Education Trust-New York
- Citizens Committee for Children of New York
- United Neighborhood Houses