

NYC-DOE School Free Meals Program

Plentiful and Tasty Prepared Food for Struggling New Yorkers

Where is the Publicity?



After nearly a year into COVID, the NYC-Department of Education is now running a "grab and go" breakfast and lunch program that lives up to its potential. All struggling New Yorkers, including 700,000 low income children attending DOE schools, can benefit with free tasty and nutritious meals.

Let's Get the Word Out!

- A diverse changing menu, with hot and cold meals (to be reheated at home), can be picked up with three days worth of food in one trip. ***THIS IS GREAT NEWS! WHERE IS THE PUBLICITY?***
- To ensure no one goes hungry during the COVID-19 emergency, Congress has authorized every school district in the country to give out as many meals as there is demand for. After SNAP, the School Breakfast and Lunch Program is the second largest anti-hunger program in the country.
- As important as the grab and go program is, there very little publicity. Not a single news article or TV story. MUCH MORE is needed to get word out. Here are just a few outlets: Social Media. LINK NYC. Community food pantries, CBO's posting fliers for non-English language speakers.
- Let's get the word out: calling all elected officials, government agencies, activists, policy advocates, CBO's, media outlets, reporters, mayoral candidates to help here.



For policy analysis of the NYC-DOE school meals program, see my [*Practical Strategies for Helping New Yorkers Not Go Hungry Without any Additional Costs to New York City*](#) report and [*February Update*](#).

Email Alert 2:

Dear NYC Anti-Hunger Organization

I have been trying to figure out what is the best way to publicize the recent and very positive changes in the NYC-DOE school grab and go meals program. I am inviting your organization to join an outreach initiative to spread the great news that NYC-DOE is providing great hot and cold meals, several days worth, with one trip. Let's partner to get the word out. It's easy to do.

Here are the key details:

Background – I recently sent an email alert to each of your organizations about the following big change to the NYC-DOE grab and go meals program: NYC families can now pick up a package of hot and cold meals (that can be reheated at home) sufficient to last three days at a time.

Quality – The DOE food tastes great! I picked up the southwest burrito and black beans salad. I shared it with my son, who is a DOE student. We agreed the heated-up burrito and salad were excellent. This is a huge and welcome development compared to the same cold sandwiches, day after day, served last spring and this fall (pizza was offered during the summer months).

The Challenge - I am emailing you now because of one huge problem. *There is zero public information about DOE's big change.* Hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers have no easy way to learn about the change – they are still waiting in food pantry lines, still hunger-insecure. As of this past October, participation in the DOE program was down 75% from pre-COVID levels.

Your Website - I visited each of your websites below. While your websites publicize the NYC-DOE school meals program, and explain that school meals are important anti-hunger programs for NYC families, none of them give notice of the big change in the grab and go program.

- <https://state.nokidhungry.org/new-york/>
- <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/tisch/>
- <https://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/>
- <https://www.hungerfreeamerica.org/en-us/nyc>
- www.communityfoodadvocatesnyc.org
- <https://www.cunyurbanfoodpolicy.org/>
- <https://hungersolutionsny.org/>
- <https://www.foodbanknyc.org/>



Begin with your Website - I am writing to invite each of your organizations, starting with your own website, to help jumpstart a campaign to tell New Yorkers about the big change in the NYC-DOE grab and go meals program. Simply announce the change on your site.

Help Translate the News -- The DOE signage about the big change is only in English. There is desperate need for the publicity to target to NYC's speakers of languages other than English.

Craft Your Own Organization's flyer -- If each organization created it own fliers and began disseminating this information in NYC's neighborhoods with the greatest number of hunger insecure families, the participation numbers will start going up. With this kind of outreach, we can get may get back to pre-COVID-19 levels of school breakfast and lunch meals participation.

Use your Newsletter -- What about posting this information in your weekly newsletter that goes out to the entire anti-hunger network of NYC?

NYC-DOE Office of Food and Nutrition Services

data: Last August, Hunger Free America-NY, Education Trust-NY, Community Food Advocates and United Way-NYC asked the DOE to issue regular updates on school meals participation. This request is still urgent. Around 70% of all DOE students are attending school fully remote. The DOE can help by providing weekly updates on the grab and go meals participation numbers by zip code and/or school district. The DOE has the data. Your organizations can use the data to target your outreach efforts.

Sample Message – We look to your expertise to craft your message. But, the core idea can be expressed in the simplest of terms: “DOE has new, great -tasting meals, hot and cold, for your family. Pick up three day packages of food. Don't miss out on these new, great-tasting meals.”



Your organizations working together can make a huge difference in food insecurity in a short time. This is an important moment. Join forces to get the word out. DOE meals are available, delicious, and free! It's now a fact. And, if families start using the NYC-DOE grab and go meals, there won't need to be long lines and food shortages at neighborhood food pantries.

Please let me know if you're in. I am looking forward to hearing from you. If I can be helpful in anyway, please just let me know.

Best,

David Rubel

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Email Alert 3:

GOOD NEWS!

Hunger insecure families can now pick up several days of hot and cold meals at NYC-DOE school buildings

As of April, NYC-DOE is now offering a grab and go meals program that should result in much greater participation. A diverse menu of hot and cold meals with multiple days pick up! We are glad to see the recommendations from two reports getting implemented. The [first report](#) was issued in September along with an update in February. Here are the highlights from our [February 2021 Update](#) (which covered the first five months of the school year):

Practical Strategies for Helping New Yorkers Not Go Hungry Without any Additional Costs to New York City February 2021 Update

- 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. Here is the chicken wrap and bean salad (it's delicious). 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.



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