



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

Hinchey Announces Historic Completion of Universal School Meals Expansion in 2025 State Budget, Delivering Free Breakfast and Lunch to All New York Students

MICHELLE HINCHEY May 12, 2025



Red Hook, Rhinebeck, New Paltz, and Schools Statewide Newly Eligible for Universal School Meals Following Budget Push Led by Senator Michelle Hinchey, Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas, and Coalition of Students, Teachers, and Parents

RED HOOK, NY – In a historic victory for students and families across New York, State Senator Michelle Hinchey, the prime Senate sponsor of the [Universal School Meals Act](#), today announced the inclusion of her legislation in the FY 2026 Enacted State Budget, officially making free breakfast and lunch available to all students in the Hudson Valley and

across New York State. Thanks to investments secured over the past three budget cycles (FY 2024, FY 2025, and now FY 2026), 2.7 million New York students stand to benefit from the program.

The announcement caps a years-long coalition effort led by Hinchey, Assembly sponsor Jessica González-Rojas, and the [Healthy School Meals for All NY Kids Coalition](#)—an alliance of over 350 schools, unions, anti-hunger groups, parents, teachers, and students. Together, they've championed the need for universal school meals and its far-reaching benefits, from improved student health and academic performance to the elimination of stigma and school meal debt, and economic relief for families, who will [save an estimated \\$165 per child](#) each month on food costs.

Hinchey and González-Rojas celebrated the milestone at Mill Road Primary School in Red Hook with 5th graders, including three who delivered remarks: Mahi Jain, Kimberly Merchan, and Gunner Lynch. They were joined by NYSUT President Melinda Person, Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha—who has been a legislative champion of the program, Red Hook CSD Superintendent Janet Warden, Rhinebeck CSD Superintendent Albert Cousins, Lawrence Anthony, the Director of Food Services for Red Hook, Rhinebeck, and Pine Plains, along with teachers, school board members, food service staff, and advocates. With the program's final expansion now secured, the Red Hook, Rhinebeck, and New Paltz school districts—located within Hinchey's Senate district—will be newly eligible to opt into the program, joining other Hudson Valley school districts, including Saugerties, Kingston, Highland, Hyde Park, Catskill and others that qualified under expansions from previous years.

“Our vision to bring Universal School Meals to New York is one of the most consequential public goods we've delivered for children and families in a generation—setting our students

up to succeed in school and beyond,” said **Senator Michelle Hinchey**. “I am deeply proud to sponsor the Universal School Meals bill and to have led this historic fight in the Senate for the past four years alongside Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas. Guaranteeing free breakfast and lunch means no child has to learn hungry, we eliminate the stigma that once held students back, and we deliver tangible savings and peace of mind to families. I cannot wait to see more students across our communities, including right here in Dutchess County, join the program and thrive because of it.”

Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas said, “What an incredible victory! I’m so proud of our team, the advocates, parents, union leaders, and the bipartisan coalition that made this possible. I’m especially grateful to have worked alongside Senator Hinchey and the dedicated advocates who co-championed this important bill. This was a hard-fought battle over three years — and we delivered. Now, 2.7 million students across New York State will have access to healthy breakfasts and lunches during the school day. This victory brings us one step closer to ending food insecurity — a crisis that should not exist in a state as wealthy as ours. It’s a testament to what we can achieve when we come together and put New Yorkers first. Universal School Meals means a better, healthier New York for everyone. We got it done!”

Melinda Person, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) President, said, “Today marks a transformational moment for children across New York. By expanding universal school meals statewide, we’re ensuring that no child will face the impossible task of trying to learn while hungry. Every child deserves dignity, nourishment and the chance to embrace opportunity. Congratulations to Senator Michelle Hinchey and Assemblymember Jessica Gonzalez Rojas for this victory that is the result of years of relentless advocacy. Our deep thanks to Governor Hochul and the Legislature for recognizing that providing meals to our children isn’t simply an act of compassion – it’s fundamental to their achievement and future success.”

Red Hook CSD Superintendent Janet Warden said, “We are thrilled to celebrate the expansion of New York’s Universal School Meals program, a critical step toward ensuring that every student has access to the nutrition they need to learn, grow, and thrive. This program is not just about food, it’s about equity, dignity, and opportunity for all children. We are deeply grateful to Senator Hinchey for her tireless advocacy and leadership in making this vision a reality for our students and families.”

Rhinebeck CSD Superintendent Albert Cousins said, “We applaud Senator Hinchey and New York lawmakers for their advocacy to ensure that all students have access to school meals so they can be ready to learn, play, and be their best selves.”

“By ensuring every student has access to free school meals, this year’s budget can be summed up in one word: historic,” said **Liz Accles, Executive Director of Community Food Advocates, co-lead organization of the Healthy School Meals for All New York Kids Coalition**. “No longer will stigma stop students from getting the food they need. No longer will parents worry about school meal debt as the cost of living continues to rise. As the ninth state to implement universal school meals, New York is not only investing in its children, it is investing in its future by ensuring students get the nutritious food they need to thrive.”

“We are proud to stand alongside Senator Michelle Hinchey and Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas as we celebrate this historic victory for New York’s children,” said **Andrés Vives, Chief Executive Officer of Hunger Solutions New York, co-lead organization of the Healthy School Meals for All New York Kids coalition**. “With the enactment of universal school meals, New York is ensuring every child has the nourishment they need to learn and thrive—no questions asked. This investment will eliminate stigma, support learning, and help families stretch their grocery budgets. We applaud New York’s lawmakers for their leadership and commitment to students, families, and schools.”

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