



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

John W. Mannion

Senator John W. Mannion and Assemblymember Al Stirpe Announce \$134m in State Budget to Continue Funding Free School Meals for Students

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SYRACUSE, NY – Senator John W. Mannion and Assemblymember Al Stirpe today announced \$134M in the state budget to fund free school meals for students. With federal funding running out, continuing this successful pandemic-era program that provides free breakfast and lunch was a high priority for the Legislature.

Senator Mannion said, “Free school meals may be the most consequential achievement in the state budget because it helps kids learn and succeed, covers the

costs for school districts and local taxpayers, and it will have an immediate impact. Kids can't learn on empty stomachs or if they face the stigma of needing free meals. I appreciate my partnership with Assemblyman Stirpe on delivering these critical resources for Central New York students and school districts."

Assemblyman Al Stirpe said," At the core of a student's academic performance is their wellbeing and that includes access to breakfast and lunch in school. In this year's budget, the state continues to step up and secured funding to expand access to free school meals for students. I stand firmly with my partner in government, Senator John Mannion, in this effort, as it will help remove the financial burden many local families experience and lessen food insecurity in our state. Ultimately it is one less barrier for our students and one less concern for our families."

The federal government funded free breakfast and lunch for all students regardless of household income since the early days of the pandemic, but it expired last June at the end of the academic year. Approximately 700,000 students in New York lost access to free school meals after the federal pandemic program concluded.

Under the enacted 2023-2024 State Budget, schools that participate in the federal Community Eligibility Program (CEP) will be reimbursed by the state for the cost of all meals that are not currently covered by the federal government (the federal government continues to pay for meals of students who are income-eligible for free or reduced lunch price.)

Currently, schools where 40 percent of the students qualify for free meals qualify for the CEP program. The federal government has recently announced that it will drop that qualification to 25 percent, thus making many more schools in the state eligible. With the state's support, schools who qualify but had not enrolled due to lack of funds, or new schools that will now qualify for the program, can benefit from providing free meals to all students at no cost to the school or the students.

New funding in the state budget, combined with federal programs, will provide free breakfast and lunch to approximately 81 percent of the state's student population.

Dan Bowles, Superintendent of the North Syracuse Central School District said, "The North Syracuse Central School District is incredibly grateful to Senator Mannion, Assemblyman Stirpe and other local and state lawmakers for continuing to fight for students to get the nutrition they need. Hunger is a real issue and it isn't something that any student should have to worry about. School district superintendents have

all spoken about the importance of offering nutritious, healthy foods to students in our schools so students can focus on their job - learning. I think I speak for all of us when I say thank you to our Senator Mannion and Assemblyman Stirpe for helping ensure our students get what they need to succeed.”

Paul Farfaglia, President of the North Syracuse Central School Board said, “The Board of Education of the North Syracuse Central School District is very pleased with the change in this legislation and would like to express our gratitude. This is an extremely important benefit that is a necessity for many of our students and their families. This will help provide our students a healthy foundation upon which they can excel. Thank you!”

John Kuryla, President North Syracuse Education Association said, “Both Assemblyman Stirpe and Senator Mannion continue to champion the needs of our communities. Food insecurity and hunger are a real issue for so many. This legislation is a game changer for our students and their families. Our public schools are more than just academic centers. Public schools unite all of us. By increasing access to healthy, nutritious food for our students, we simultaneously increase the likelihood of academic success, support their social/emotional development, and level the playing field for all students. The ability of our elected leaders to be relentlessly attuned to the needs of our communities and creatively address the most pressing issues is valued and deeply appreciated.”

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