



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michelle Hinchey

Hinchey Champions Significant Expansion of Free School Meals

[Michelle Hinchey](#)

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KINGSTON, NY – Senator Michelle Hinchey today announced that due to her advocacy during FY'24 budget negotiations, \$135 million in new funding has been secured to expand access to free school meals, making nearly 90% of schools in Hinchey's district eligible to provide students with free breakfast and lunch. As a result, more students, families, and schools will have an opportunity to benefit from access to meals at no cost, minimizing stigma, eliminating unpaid meal charges, and reducing paperwork and meal service operations for school staff and families.

Senator Michelle Hinchey said, “This year, we took an unprecedented stand on the urgent need to combat child hunger in New York and built a movement that resulted in the significant expansion of free school meals. Because of our fight, over 30,000 students in SD-41 alone will have access to free breakfast and lunch, setting them up for success while saving local families money each week in grocery costs. We will continue to build on this transformative progress and fight for more support, more resources, and more solutions until every student in New York has access to free, healthy meals at school.”

For nearly two years during the COVID-19 pandemic, federal funding ensured students universal access to free school meals. When the benefit expired in June of 2022, more than 726,000 students across New York lost access to free meals, and school meal debt skyrocketed. As the sponsor of legislation ([S1678A](#)) to fund free school meals, Hinchey led a coalition of over [280](#) education, health, labor, and anti-hunger advocates and won a significant expansion of the new initiative.

Starting in the 2023-24 school year, the state will reimburse schools participating in the federal Community Eligibility Program, covering the costs of all meals not currently supported by the federal government. Currently, schools in which 40% of students qualify for free meals qualify for CEP. The federal government is dropping that qualification to 25%, which will help expand eligibility to many more schools in New York State.

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