



Testimony Prepared for the
Joint Legislative Hearing on the FY 2018-19 Executive Budget
Agriculture

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony as part of the FY 2018-19 Joint Legislative Hearings on the Executive Budget. The New York School Nutrition Association and its 4,400 plus members write in support of a proposal in the FY 2018-19 Executive Budget to increase the per meal lunch reimbursement rate from 6 cents to 25 cents. This will be the first state reimbursement increase in 40 years and will not only provide much needed financial support to school food programs, but it will also increase school purchases of local New York food products.

The New York School Nutrition Association (NYSNA), is a membership organization which represents over 4,400 school nutrition professionals which include, managers, directors, registered dietitians, nutritionists, and industry members, and we respectfully request that you increase funding for the school lunch program.

Our goal as child nutrition professionals is to ensure that every hungry child has access to the healthiest, most nutritious food possible. Why? Because they are hungry, and if we have one child hungry in a classroom trying to learn, that is one child to many.

We know a hungry child cannot learn. Studies have shown that a hungry child cannot focus, they start to get fidgety and start to act out. The result is that they do not learn.

We thank the governor for his No Student goes Hungry program proposal. The program's goal is the same as NYSNA's goal of ensuring that every hungry child has access to the healthiest, most nutritious food possible.

For the purposes of this testimony, we would like to address Proposal 4, **Increase the Use of Farm-Fresh, Locally Grown Foods at School**. This proposal incentivizes schools to purchase more NY grown, produced or processed foods for school meals. The proposal recommends increasing reimbursement for free or full priced meals by 19 cents and increasing reimbursement by 5 cents for reduced-price meals, if 30% of the total food purchases come from NY grown, produced or processed foods.

The governor has appropriated 10 million dollars in the education portion of his Executive Budget for this purpose. Again, NYSNA supports this proposal knowing that it will have very positive outcomes for the children's health, the farmer and the local economy.

NYSNA kindly asks for one minor tweak. Instead of requiring 30% of **total food purchases** to meet the reimbursement threshold, we recommend that the proposal require the 30% threshold to be based on the **total cost of lunch purchases**. Total cost would be based on the previous school year's **reimbursable lunches** sold. "Lunch Purchases for Lunches sold".

We believe this was a minor oversight that could discourage high-needs school districts from taking advantage of the incentive program. In NY State half the children are eligible to eat free meals because their district participates in the Community Eligibility Provision or CEP.

Because those districts participate in CEP they are more apt to offer breakfast after the bell, after school snacks, and summer meals. These are programs that districts with low percentage of free/reduced students may not qualify to offer.

As a result, a district of high-needs may potentially have to purchase double the amount of NY food as a district of low-needs of a similar size and receive the same amount in reimbursement from the incentive. Because NY product is typically more expensive, the incentive would end up costing the districts of high needs more money than intended and they would not be able to afford to participate.

We urge the legislature to make this small correction to the current language, to prevent this unforeseen circumstance from occurring.

Finally, a school-milk carton costs 6 cents to produce. . We get 6 cents in reimbursement from NYS for every free & and full priced lunch that we serve. We have received the same 6 cents for over 40 years now, without an increase. It costs close to 19 cents to fill an empty carton with milk. We urge the legislature to leave the 10 million dollars in the proposed budget and make that one minor tweak so that every district will want to fill a milk carton with NY milk and have a chance to qualify for that extra 19 cents in reimbursement. This would benefit our students' health, our farmers, and our economy.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.