

NEW YORK CITY POLICY AGENDA

2025

“No Kid Hungry New York believes that all children, no matter their borough or circumstances, deserve the opportunity to be safe and nourished, to live up to their full potential and able to achieve their dreams. Adequate nutrition, both at school and at home, is essential to a child’s physical and emotional development, health outcomes and educational attainment. Hunger takes a profound toll on children’s health, happiness, and their ability to build successful futures and break the cycle of poverty. Unfortunately, thousands of New York City children – **an estimated 1 in 4** – could face hunger this year with children in historically marginalized communities at greater risk.”

Although food insecurity is one of the most daunting challenges facing our City, it is also one of the most readily solvable. **With the right policies, New York City can lead the country in combatting rising hunger and making lasting change that ensures that no New Yorker faces hunger in the future.**

Nutrition Programs in the New York City Public Schools

School meals help children learn and thrive. Research shows they are the healthiest meals that many children eat, and for some, school meals are their most consistent source of nutrition. Over the years, the New York City Public Schools (NYCPS) has expanded access to school meals by implementing Breakfast After the Bell programs and offering no-cost breakfast and lunch to all students.

Full Implementation of Breakfast After the Bell

Students who start the school day with breakfast have higher attendance rates, better test scores and fewer chronic health problems. Breakfast in the Classroom and Grab and Go programs are proven effective to connect more kids with breakfast. Despite New York City’s longstanding leadership in expanding access to breakfast, some schools claim operational barriers to implementing the 2018 New York State legislation mandating Breakfast After the Bell and do not participate in a meaningful way. New York City must ensure ALL schools offer alternative breakfast models.

Culturally Responsive Meals

NYCPS has prioritized expanding access to different types of meals including kosher, halal and plant-based options. Each year, they have also expanded plant-based options. Failure to accommodate cultural food preferences can discourage children from participating in school, nutrition programs, so this expansion has helped increase participation. New York City should continue to expand diverse food options and continue to prioritize student feedback as students are more likely to consume meals they enjoy.

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Summer Meals Accessibility

Summer meals historically reach far fewer eligible students than meals served during the school year, making summer the hungriest time of the year. In New York City, barriers to access often include accessibility of meal sites and lack of program awareness among families. Broad promotion of available meal sites is integral to reducing summer hunger among New York City's children. Ensuring that information regarding meal sites comes from trusted messengers, such as schools, elected officials, principals, parent advisory councils, and faith leaders, is an important way to encourage families to participate in the summer meals program. Expanding the number of meal sites and strategically placing them with input from local stakeholders to avoid gaps in service are both essential strategies to increase summer meals participation.

Expand School Pantries and Mobile Markets

In 2016, New York City created first-in-the-nation food and hygiene pantries in New York City public schools. The school pantries provide food, cleaning supplies, menstrual products and tools to address hygiene. Knowing how many communities across the city struggle to access fresh produce, partnering with other city agencies and nonprofit organizations to set up mobile markets could also increase access to fresh produce and resources for families. School pantries also provide another opportunity to promote other safety net programs.

Coordination and Collaboration Across New York City Agencies

Agencies across New York City touch the lives of children and families, yet programs are often run in silos and cross-agency promotion is rare. With so many New Yorkers facing food insecurity, it is critical that agencies come together to broaden awareness and outreach to support families in need.

Increase Awareness, Outreach and Enrollment for Nutrition Programs

Federal safety net programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Medicaid and Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (Summer EBT or S-EBT) exist to help eligible families put food on the table. However, these programs only work when people can access them. More broadly, New York City should look for opportunities to educate families about public benefits and cross-promote the range of supports available.

A promising option is to promote and support SNAP enrollment through schools. In addition to connecting families with valuable nutrition support in a familiar location, it also makes it easier for families to access Summer EBT. There are many ways NYCPS can partner with CBOs and other city agencies to achieve this goal.

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In addition to investing in outreach, New York City must also work to address systemic barriers to ensure equitable access to public benefits. This should include partnering with CBOs, strengthening transportation access, removing burdensome paperwork requirements and streamlining access, improving technology, and addressing the impacts of structural racism and discriminatory policies.

Support Immigrant Families

Although the changes to public charge rules proposed under the first Trump administration were rescinded, the chilling effect on participation in safety net programs among immigrant families continues. With increased rhetoric around immigration yet again and uncertainty as to what may occur during the second Trump administration, it has never been more important to invest in support tailored to immigrant communities. Navigators who are trained in current public charge rules as well as the implications of potential proposals can dispel misinformation and maximize use of public benefits while helping families make informed decisions. New York City should promote cultural competency and language access wherever possible, as well as partner with trusted CBOs.

Comprehensive Outreach and Advocacy Campaign on Tax Credits

Although the enhancements to the federal Child Tax Credit (CTC) authorized by the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 have expired, the federal CTC along with the Empire State Child Credit remain helpful tools for reducing poverty. New York City should continue to promote its free tax preparation services through the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection and other city agencies to ensure that eligible families take advantage of these credits.

New York City must advocate for changes to tax credits. As Congress prepares to revisit the provisions of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act due to expire in 2025, New York City should be a leading voice in advocating for improvements to the CTC as part of any tax package, such as an increased credit value and enhanced refundability. Additionally, New York City should advocate for improvements to the Empire State Child Credit as well as the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to ensure equity for all children.

Child Hunger Task Force

In order to address the child hunger crisis in a holistic way, New York City should convene a Child Hunger Task Force, composed of a range of stakeholders including city agencies, elected officials, non-profits, faith-based leaders and other key voices. The Task Force's mandate might include identifying barriers that impede families from accessing nutrition programs along with policies and programs to address those very barriers; cross-agency promotion of child nutrition programs; and recommendations for new initiatives. Making the Task Force a formal structure ensures that it is a long-standing commitment and priority for the City of New York.



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Innovation and Leadership

The eyes of the world are always on New York City and we have an opportunity to lead in implementation and advocacy on programs that can address child food insecurity.

Provide Adult Meals at Summer Meals Sites

Despite summer being referred to as the hungriest time of year, when asked why they did not participate in the summer meals programs before COVID, many parents responded it was because only the child could eat and there weren't meals available for adults. Since children in New York City must eat each meal on site, it is less appealing to accompany a child for each meal when you cannot eat with them.

Leading Voice at the Federal Level

Many key policy changes can only happen with intervention or approval from the federal government. As negotiations occur on the Farm Bill, Child Nutrition Reauthorization, Tax Policy and other relevant legislation, New York City can play a major role in advocating for policy change to expand program access, such as providing flexibilities to the summer meals program to make it easier for families across the city to access these programs. For example, for many children in New York City, limited transportation can inhibit access to congregate meal sites. A 2022 law made a non-congregate option permanent in rural communities, but New York City does not currently qualify. New York City can also be a critical ally in protecting and strengthening SNAP, such as extending federal replacement of stolen benefits, increasing EBT card security, and preserving USDA's authority to revise the Thrifty Food Plan.

Meal Accessibility on Weekends and Holidays

The typical 180-day school year represents just under half of all days in a year. Summer weekdays only add about 50 more days. More than one-third of the year is made up of "non-traditional times" where children do not have consistent access to school meals or summer meals programs, such as weekends, holidays, and school breaks. New York City should explore opportunities to provide better availability of food options during this time whether through schools, city-funded programs or community organizations to ensure children have access to meals no matter the day.

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