



Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council

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May 12, 2022

Chancellor David Banks
Department of Education
Tweed Courthouse
52 Chambers Street
New York, New York 10007

Dear Chancellor Banks,

CPAC's Request for Support on the Enhanced Cafeteria Redesign

As proud parents and guardians of New York City public school students, we are grateful for your long-time support of our efforts to ensure our kids receive the best possible education. Thanks to your partnership over the years, we have made significant gains in public education to the greater benefit of our communities and the City at large. Now, we are calling on you to invest \$250 million in the Capital Plan towards an additional 500 cafeteria redesigns that would serve all middle and high school students. This modest, one-time investment would dramatically enhance students' school day experiences and ultimately translate to better educational outcomes.

Children cannot learn on an empty stomach. There is ample evidence showing the direct correlation between school meal participation and standardized test scores. In one Syracuse University study looking at universal free meal participation and academic performance, students' math and ELA test scores increased at a rate equivalent to an additional 10 weeks of learning. These dramatic findings underscore the significance of school meal participation to long-term student success.

That is why we are so excited by the latest data highlighting the success of the Office of Food and Nutrition Services' (OFNS) Cafeteria Enhancement Experience (CEE). By updating school cafeterias with new features like deli-style serving lines and more socially inviting seating, 44 cafeterias have already transformed students' lunch experiences and subsequently seen increased participation in school meals.

The results speak to the direct impact that food presentation and ambience has on school food participation rates. According to an analysis of CEE schools by Community Food Advocates, high schools with CEE have seen a 35% increase in lunch participation. OFNS data also shows that more fruits and vegetables are served in CEE cafeterias compared to cafeterias without the redesign. The food court style serving lines also reduce waiting times for students, meaning they have more time during their lunch period to eat and socialize with friends. Anecdotally, many of us have heard first-hand from our children, their teachers, and other school staff how the cafeteria redesign has improved their school lunch experiences and ultimately helped them have more productive school days.

Free school meals are an essential tool to boosting student academic performance and advancing educational equity in schools, but the relatively low participation rate among students across NYC schools is a major barrier to realizing the program's potential. As parents, we know how difficult it is to keep hungry kids motivated and engaged with their schoolwork. We are tremendously grateful to entrust our children to New York City's dedicated public school teachers, and we want to ensure that they have every possible tool in their arsenal to set students up for success. That is why we urge you to make cafeteria redesign a priority and commit an additional \$250 million towards a master plan phase-in of 500 cafeteria redesigns for all NYC middle and schools. This one-time investment will translate to exponential educational gains for NYC students and ultimately make our city a more equitable place.

With much appreciation,

The Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council

Approved by the membership at its May, 12, 2022 meeting

Cc: Camille Joseph Varlack, NYCDOE Special Advisor, Operations
Sheena Wright, Deputy Mayor, Strategic Initiatives
Kevin Moran, NYCDOE Chief School Operations Officer
Chris Tricarico, NYCDOE Senior Executive Director, Office of Food and Nutrition Services
Liz Accles, Executive Director, Community Food Advocates
Rachel Atcheson, Senior Assistant to the Mayor, Office of the Mayor of New York City
Kate MacKenzie, Director, Mayor's Office of Food Policy