



Children's Defense Fund

## **For Immediate Release**

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# **City Losing Out on \$73 Million in Summer Meal Aid While Children Go Hungry**

*Children's Defense Fund - New York and Public Advocate Call on City to Open More Summer Meal Sites*

The Children's Defense Fund - New York and Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum are calling upon the City Department of Education to vastly expand the summer breakfast and lunch program that is supposed to be available to children throughout New York City, but which has steadily declined in recent years.

At a press conference on Wednesday, May 25 at 11:30 AM on the steps of City Hall, Children's Defense Fund - New York will release a new study, "Summer Meals for Children 2004: A Failing Grade for New York City." The report documents how participation in the summer meals program dropped 15% from 2003 to 2004 and how New York City is failing to access a potential \$73 million in federal aid available to feed the City's children.

"It is intolerable that children in New York are not getting the nutritious meals that they need, especially when this program is paid for completely with federal dollars," said Donna Lawrence, executive director of the Children's Defense Fund - New York. "More than a million children are eligible, but less than 140,000 participated last summer."

"A wholesome, nutritious breakfast and lunch improves student achievement and development. DOE has dropped the ball on accessing federal funds for summer meals and has not made it any easier for qualified students to participate. By limiting access to these meals, the City is failing its students, a great amount of whom qualify for summer meals," said New York City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, who authored a report in 2002 which found that New York City has the highest eligibility rate for free and reduced price breakfasts in the state, but the lowest participation rate among the eligible."

Summer meals are available to all students enrolled in summer school at the sites where they attend school but because of scheduling conflicts, many students are unable to avail themselves of the program. Further, only a limited number of sites are open to all children in the neighborhood, whether or not they are attending summer school. The report documents the fact that in 2004, there were no open sites from 53<sup>rd</sup> Street to 103<sup>rd</sup> Street on Manhattan's West Side for instance. Children's Defense Fund - New York is calling on the city to open all summer meals sites to all children in the community who need breakfast and lunch.

"This could be a win-win situation for the City if it expands access to summer meals," said Lawrence. "First, more children will be fed at a time when child poverty in New York City is increasing and many federal programs for the poor are being cut. Second, up to \$73 million in federal funds could flow to New York, giving our local economy a badly needed shot in the arm."

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