



Children's Defense Fund

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A FREE LUNCH FOR KIDS

There really is such a thing as a free lunch - at least for kids. But unless NYC acts immediately to make the federally-funded summer meals program more available, more than one million city children will miss out on them, and the city will miss out on a lot of money. Under the program, eligible children, almost all city kids under 19, can have a free breakfast and a free lunch at participating sites during July and August. Students attending summer school are automatically offered meals, but the meals also are available for eligible children not in school.

The Children's Defense Fund - New York just released a report, "Summer Meals for Children 2004: A Failing Grade for New York City", about last year's summer meals program. As the title suggests, NYC gets an "F" for its effort. Summer meals 2004 was the program's low point to date: more than a million children were eligible for the summer meals, but only 140,000 were fed, representing a drop of 15 percent from the previous year. The city is now making an effort to publicize the 2005 summer meals program, however, there are still not enough sites, especially in those neighborhoods where there are thousands of eligible, low-income children.

In Queens, 70 elementary and middle schools will be open for summer school and/or the summer meals program this year. These sites expect to serve an estimated 25,000 children. But in Queens, more than 183,000 children are eligible for either free or reduced price meals. Even if the 70 schools serve meals to capacity, there would still be 158,000 children who did not access the meals program with a potential loss to the local and city-wide economies of more than \$18 million federal dollars (an amount based on full participation by eligible low-income students in Queens public schools). Last year, NYC missed out on a potential \$73 million in available federal reimbursement money for the summer meals program by not making the program accessible to all eligible children. This is a win-win situation for the city. All the city has to do to is take quick action to increase access by making all summer school sites open to all eligible community children, and open additional summer meal sites.

In addition, the city can change the schedule for serving meals during summer school. Breakfast is available for summer school students only from 8:00 to 8:30 a.m. But even if all students were able to get to school early enough to eat breakfast, since there is no break for a snack, and lunch is not served until after school ends at 1:00 p.m., students will sit in school for almost 5 hours without

food! Worse yet, most students will then skip lunch because they will be anxious about getting home or having more free time.

The Children's Defense Fund - New York report recommends a "Grab and Go" bag breakfast for summer school students a little later in the morning, about 9:30 or 10:00 a.m., or alternatively, serving lunch a little earlier so that students would not have to go so long without food, or find themselves having to choose between eating and going home.

The Summer Meals program begins on June 29th. To find the location of your nearest summer meals site, call 311. To get the city to increase the number of summer meal sites, especially in low-income areas and housing projects, contact your City Council representative (visit the City Council's website at www.nycouncil.info to find your council member's contact information). To get a copy of the Children's Defense Fund - New York report, call (212) 697-2323, or visit the CDF - NY website at www.cdfny.org.

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