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Building on the Foundation of Universal Free School Lunch

On September 6, 2017, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) announced the “Free School Lunch for All” (Universal) initiative. This historic change eliminates decades-long policy that has separated children by income in school cafeterias.

In the 2017-18 school year, the NYC Office of SchoolFood also introduced an innovative cafeteria redesign featuring deli-style serving lines and student-friendly seating areas (over for photos). There are 34 middle school and high school cafeterias, serving 68 individual schools, slated to receive the redesign between February 2017 and December 2018.

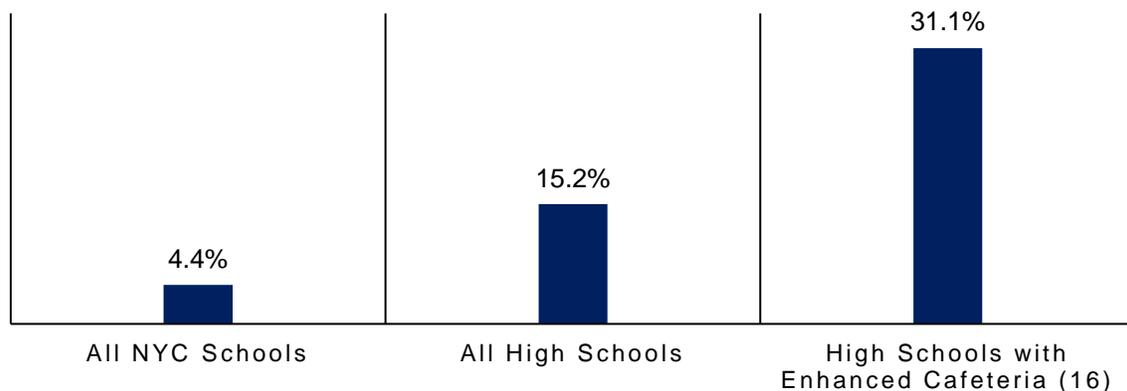
Our analysis shows the positive impact of these initiatives on school lunch participation in the first year:

- On average, 26,000 more NYC’s public school students are eating lunch every day, an overall increase of 4.4%
- Among high school students, there was a 15.2% increase in school lunch participation
- Additionally, high schools with the new Food Court Style (“enhanced”) cafeteria saw an even greater increase of 31.1%

Change in School Lunch Participation

Free School Lunch For All and
Enhanced Cafeteria

■ Percent increase from 2016-17 to 2017-18



The 2018-19 Lunch 4 Learning Agenda includes three high impact recommendations that will boost participation and help NYC’s school lunch program move towards its full potential: 1) a strong communications plan; 2) a major expansion of Food Court Style cafeterias; and 3) halal and kosher food available in NYC public school cafeterias.

About Food Court Style (“Enhanced”) Cafeterias

The new serving line includes more menu options daily, and the presentation dramatically increases the appeal of the food. The lunchrooms are more comfortable and inviting, with diner-style booths and round tables replacing the institutional rectangular tables with benches. Additionally, the Food Court Style serving lines have significantly reduced the time that students stand on line, allowing for more time to eat, socialize and decompress.

