



YFA Member Ariel (center) & siblings, show appreciation to essential cafeteria workers.

## DID YOU KNOW:

Over **22 million meals** were served in the first 3 months of the 2020-2021 school year!\*



\*Blended learning was on pause due to COVID mid-November

## Who we are:

### School Food Experts

We, **Youth Food Advocates (YFA)**, are students from NYC-DOE high school campuses interested in **Food Justice**, with a focus on **school food**. Our goal is making sure all **1.1 million** NYC public school students have access to the **best, and most nutritious school food**. We recognize just how important it is for students like us to be able to have the **food that fuels us** and helps us **succeed in school**.

We represent **8 NYC high school campuses** and gather weekly to advocate on behalf of all public school students.

We look forward to sharing important **information and actions** with you through our newsletter & social media.

## School Food Responds to a City in Crisis

By Ashley Yang

Last school year, at around 11:30, classes were let out for the highlight of the day, lunch. Swarms of kids from an assortment of grades flooded the cafeteria. With the “no running in the halls” rule in place, booths were snatched up by the fastest speed walkers and the line for hot school lunch quickly wrapped around the entire perimeter of the cafeteria. The line hummed with impatience and the door opened soon after. The stagnant line was soon a bustle of rotations, resulting in plates of hot food in the hands of all the students. The line would sometimes be so long that your waiting time for lunch was twice that you got to actually eat. **Lunch at my school was a hit.**

I’m not sure the same could be said about school meals’ popularity today, pandemic style. Steaming hot trays of the school favorites of mozzarella sticks and tacos have been traded for yogurts, hummus, corn, sandwiches and pretzels- though they sound just as delicious, their popularity doesn’t seem to come close to pre-pandemic meals. In September 2020, nearly 8 million meals were served. In the following months, around 1.5 million less meals were served. (During these months, all students were remote as a result to a spike in COVID 19 cases). Even though the number of meals have decreased, possibly due to accessibility challenges, **it is evident that New York City students still rely on school food for their three meals a day.**

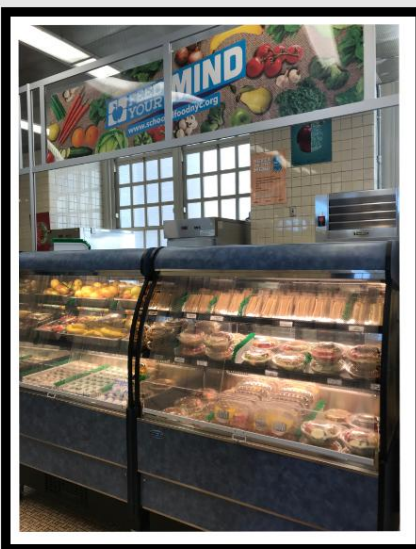
As each month of the COVID-19 pandemic goes by, food insecurity in NYC grows, but less students are eating school food than the months prior. We have been given an opportunity and a need to reflect on the importance of school food. From the actual meals distributed to the communication from your school, we have created a way to rate and analyze your school’s performance with our YFA School Food Report Card. Read on to learn more!

# YFA Partner Spotlight

By Diannah Plaisir



P.S.51, 1900-1920



Enhanced Cafeteria, 2019



- Grab & Go, Meals, 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed how we all work and live, and **Youth Food Advocates** is no exception. Before NYC school buildings closed in March 2020, we were hosted by one school building and worked to build partnerships within the five high school campuses in the building.

The virtual world has its advantages, YFA members have been able to form **new partnerships** with other **Food Justice** advocates. YFA hosted a meeting with young people from TFFJ in December to learn about each other's advocacy in the school food space.

## Youth Food Advocates Talks To:

Renae Cairns  
Advocacy & Community Engagement Manager



Teens for Food Justice

## Excerpts from January 2021 interview with Renae:

### YFA: What are the goals of TFFJ?

**Renae:** Our goal is to end food insecurity and cultivate greater health equity by supporting the next generation of young people in building a healthy, fair and sustainable food system.

### YFA: What are some current projects?

**Renae:** Due to COVID-19, our school farms are closed throughout New York City. In response, we've pivoted to support our students and communities with the following project(s): In collaboration with our partner communities in the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn, we launched weekly and biweekly food distributions. Through this work, we are building relationships with food providers that can be sustained after the COVID crisis.

### YFA: How did COVID-19 impact your work?

**Renae:** COVID-19 has impacted us greatly. All of the staff miss working alongside students in our school farms. Additionally, COVID-19 has underlined the deeply rooted structural racism in our society that implicates our food, health and education systems (to name a few). The need to build just and equitable food and health systems is a need as old as our country itself and we believe our work is as important now as it has ever been.

### YFA: How can others get involved?

**Renae:** Students and young people interested in further exploring food, social justice and advocacy are encouraged to join our free after school program.

## Take Action!

- We've created a report card for school food
- It only takes a few minutes to grade your school food and cafeteria
- Ask other students to participate

Fill out the report card here:

[bit.ly/YFASchoolFoodReportCard](https://bit.ly/YFASchoolFoodReportCard)

Does your School Lunch make the grade?

Youth Food Advocates are fighting to improve school food for all NYC public school students. We want to hear from you!

- Results will be published in the next YFA Newsletter.

Comments, questions, or feedback?  
[youth@foodadvocates.org](mailto:youth@foodadvocates.org)

Additional Resources:  
Text "NYC Food" to 877-877 to find a School Meal Site near you!

