

School Food & Policy



YOUTH FOOD ADVOCATES QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



Cover Photo: Mayoral Candidates at Mayoral Food Forum in February 2021

NYC Mayoral Candidates on the Future of School Food

by Clementine Paarlberg

With the NYC primaries coming up on June 22, it is vital to understand how each NYC mayoral candidate approaches school food policy and reform. In May, the 3 highest polling candidates were Eric Adams, Andrew Yang, and Scott Stringer. However, the majority of New Yorkers are still undecided. YFA researched all 8 top-tier candidates' campaign pages and public statements to find out more about their views on school food. In addition to the candidates named above, we researched the positions of Maya Wiley, Dianne Morales, Kathryn Garcia, Ray McGuire, and Shaun Donovan (see: Candidates' Websites On School Food chart on p.2).

Most candidates acknowledged the importance of the school food system for student success, Garcia notes on her website the importance of including universal Halal options and making structural changes to school cafeterias to make them more welcoming and accessible. She also plans to incorporate more student input into the menu. On Donovan's website, he mentions how the cafeteria is a huge part of the city's infrastructure, and a focal point of socialization and activity for students. He plans to create innovative ways to deliver nutritious, culturally-responsive foods, including Halal and Kosher meals. All candidates who mention school meals on their websites mention menu flexibility and inclusion.

Continued on p.2 "The Future of School Food."

WATCH: Full 2021 Mayoral Food Forum recording
READ: Complete written statements to all forum questions

The Future of School Food






















During the 2021 Mayoral Food Forum, we had an opportunity to ask candidates about their plans for improving school food. **Youth Food Advocates asked, "How important is school food to you? What would you do to improve the school meal experience, options, and communication?"**

Morales said that she plans to move towards local representation and community-driven solutions, and away from corporate-controlled food supply chains. Adams' written response highlights "Halal, Kosher, vegan, and options for people with extreme allergies" as extremely necessary and pointed out that the cultural appropriateness of food could be determined school by school. Stringer's statement notes that "Thirty-eight percent of students are Muslim or Jewish, and approximately 72% of New York City students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches," highlighting the importance of making sure culturally appropriate food options are available to all students.

School food is an important aspect of the school system because it gives students the energy and fuel to complete a successful school day. Many students don't participate in the city's universal meals program due to religious restrictions, dietary needs, a lack of communication from their school, or simply not feeling welcomed in their own school cafeteria. It is crucial that the next mayor understands the importance of school food for our educational success and will help ensure that every student in NYC has access to healthy, sustainable meals.

Candidates' Websites on School Food

We looked for mentions of cafeteria environment, menu flexibility, and communications on candidate websites.

Candidate	Cafeteria Environment	Menu Flexibility	Communications
 E. Adams			
 S. Donovan			
 K. Garcia			
 R. McGuire			
 D. Morales			
 S. Stringer			
 M. Wiley			
 A. Yang			

School Food Policy Timeline

Major School Food Policies: National, Grassroots, and NYC

President Truman signs the National School Lunch Act, which provides funding for free and reduced-price lunch in schools in need.

The Black Panthers begins organizing a free breakfast program in Oakland, CA. At its peak, the Black Panther Party fed thousands of children per day in at least 45 programs in Black communities across the country.

NYC Universal Free School Lunch is established, allowing all NYC public schools to offer free school meals to all 1.1 million students without collecting applications.

1946

1966

1969

2010

2017

2020

The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act (CNR) establishes the School Breakfast Program and starts with a 2-year pilot project serving breakfast to "nutritionally needy" children.

First Lady Michelle Obama works hard to help children lead healthier lives, ultimately leading to the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. First major reform in decades.

Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT) was included as part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, and extended through the 2021-2022 school year, to help families with meals while schools were closed.

School Food Report Card

We created the **YFA School Food Report Card** giving NYC public school students an opportunity to grade school food. We collected 124 responses, and discovered that many students don't believe their opinion on school lunch matters to the city.

We aim to change that!

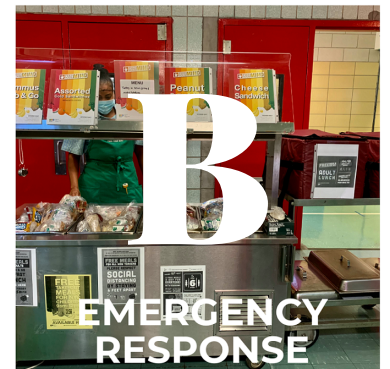
We heard from middle school students (18.5%), high school freshmen (28.2%), sophomores (34.7%), juniors (15.3%), and seniors (3.2%).

Pre-pandemic, students ate school lunch:

- 1-2 days a week (52.5%)
- 3 days a week (18.5%)
- 4-5 days a week (29.1%)

Reasons why students didn't eat school lunch:

- Food Appeal (73.4%)
- Limited Menu Options (29.8%)
- Cafeteria Environment (24.2%)
- Stigma (16.1%)
- Don't eat lunch in general / didn't specify (26.7%)



Based on all four categories, 50.0% of students gave their schools the overall grade of **B**.

Youth Advocate Spotlight

This interview was conducted by YFA Members Joseph Siguenca and Cecilia Castellon with Co-President of the Brooklyn Tech HS World Hunger Organization (BTHS W.H.O), Nafeesa Mahmood.

How did you get involved in food advocacy?

Nafeesa: Personally, my interest in world hunger and food advocacy was sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic.

What would you like to see the new mayor change about school food after the election?

Nafeesa: It would be nice to have a more variety of food in the cafeteria.

How can others get involved with food advocacy?

Nafeesa: Sign petitions, remote volunteer, and hold a food drive or fundraiser.



Since we last reached out, are there BTHS WHO updates/ activities you want to share?

Nafeesa: We have recently had a meeting in which we discussed the hunger crisis in Yemen and how it is directly a result of politics.

How has your school supported your food advocacy? What else can they do to improve helping you?

Nafeesa: At our request, our school has allowed us to publish big events in the school's Daily Announcements. An additional step that could maybe be taken on their behalf is promoting our fundraisers among the staff so the Brooklyn Tech community as a whole could gain insight on the hunger crisis as well as make a difference, if able to.

Join YFA

Are you ready to make a difference in NYC school food? YFA 2021-2022 application is open May 15 - June 15. **Apply @** [Bit.ly/YFAApplication2021](https://bit.ly/YFAApplication2021)



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