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**Title:** Resolution calling upon the New York City Department of Education to take full advantage of the Community Eligibility Option offered by the United States Department of Agriculture, in order to enable all eligible schools to provide universal free meal service to all students.

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Res. No. 1637

Resolution calling upon the New York City Department of Education to take full advantage of the Community Eligibility Option offered by the United States Department of Agriculture, in order to enable all eligible schools to provide universal free meal service to all students.

By Council Members Reyna, Brewer, Chin, Comrie, Dickens, Dromm, Jackson, James, Koppell, Lander, Mealy, Mendez, Rose, Vann, Williams, Wills, Lappin and Levin

Whereas, School breakfast and lunch are national programs, authorized by Congress and administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA); and

Whereas, The programs provide federal subsidies for each meal served as well as smaller state subsidies; and

Whereas, For the period July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013, the federal lunch reimbursement rate is \$2.86 for free lunch, \$2.46 for reduced-price lunch and 27 cents for paid lunch, while New York State lunch

reimbursement rate is 6 cents for free lunch, 20 cents for reduced-price lunch and 6 cents for paid lunch; and

Whereas, Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals, while those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals, for which students can be charged no more than 40 cents; and

Whereas, Children from families with incomes over 185 percent of poverty (currently \$42,643 annually for a family of four) pay a full price of \$1.50 for lunch in New York City public schools; and

Whereas, Even though they are eligible, many low-income children and teens do not take advantage of free school meals in order to avoid the stigma of being labeled as poor; and

Whereas, In addition, the process of collecting and verifying applications from hundreds of thousands of students every year is labor-intensive, inefficient and prone to inaccuracy; and

Whereas, The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 provides an alternative program option that can replace the inefficient, application-based system with a paperless data-driven system that allows students to eat free of charge and free of stigma; and

Whereas, This program is called the Community Eligibility Option (CEO) and is available to districts in New York State beginning in the 2012-13 school year; and

Whereas, The CEO is a viable and valuable alternative for districts and schools in high poverty areas, which reduces administrative paperwork and costs while making it easier for eligible children in low income communities to receive meals; and

Whereas, The CEO enables eligible districts or schools to serve all children meals at no charge for four successive school years, before being required to recertify eligibility; and

Whereas, The primary certification method for CEO participation is electronic “direct certification” data matching with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), called Food Stamps in New York State, or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); and

Whereas, Certain categories of students, including homeless, migrant, runaway and foster children,

among others, are also included in eligibility calculations; and

Whereas, A school, group of schools or district is eligible for the CEO if at least 40 percent of its students are directly certified for free meals based on their participation in specified programs such as SNAP and TANF; and

Whereas, To account for low-income families not reflected in the direct certification data, the USDA increases the proportion of students receiving the highest reimbursement rates, so that a school with 40 percent of its students directly certified would receive reimbursement from the USDA of 64 percent at the free lunch rate and 36 percent at the paid lunch reimbursement rate, while a school with 62.5 percent of its students directly certified would receive 100 percent reimbursement at the free lunch rate; and

Whereas, The New York City Department of Education (DOE) is the largest public school system in the United States, serving approximately 1.1 million students; and

Whereas, DOE's Office of School Food, known as "SchoolFood," is the largest school food service provider in the United States, providing over 860,000 meals each day to students in over 1,600 locations including public elementary, middle, special education and high schools, as well as charter schools and some non-public schools in the City; and

Whereas, Since 2003-04, the DOE has provided breakfast at no charge to students, regardless of their family income, in recognition of the importance of eating breakfast to learning; and

Whereas, DOE's free breakfast program has led to an increase of more than 50% in student participation, according to a report by the organization Community Food Advocates; and

Whereas, According to the DOE, in FY12, SchoolFood served an average of 642,957 lunches per day, of which 76.7% were free, 8% were reduced-price and just 15.2% paid full price; and

Whereas, Further, in FY12, 71.5% of students were eligible for free meals, 8.6% were eligible for reduced-price meals and just 20% were not eligible for free or reduced-price meals and had to pay full price, according to Community Food Advocates; and

Whereas, These numbers indicate that New York City is a low-income school district and that many or most City schools would be eligible for the CEO program; and

Whereas, To date, DOE has not applied for the CEO program for all eligible schools and should do so as soon as possible; and

Whereas, In addition to reducing paperwork and administrative costs, implementing the CEO program in all eligible City schools would encourage more children and youth to take advantage of free school meals without the stigma of being labeled as poor; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the New York City Department of Education to take full advantage of the Community Eligibility Option offered by the United States Department of Agriculture, in order to enable all eligible schools to provide universal free meal service to all students.

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