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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

Testimony of Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
on Intro 773A in relation to student participation data in free school meals  
January 25, 2016

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My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to Chair Dromm and to the Members on the Committee on Education for the opportunity to testify.

Today I would like to voice my support of Int 773A, which would require the New York City Department of Education to submit an annual report to the Speaker of the City Council regarding the provision of free meals at public schools. According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap 2015 study, 15.3% of New York County's population of 1.6 million struggle with food insecurity. With 71% living below 200% poverty, a majority of Manhattanites are likely eligible for Federal Nutrition Assistance including free school meals ([http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2013/NY\\_AllCounties\\_CDs\\_MMG\\_2013.pdf](http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/our-research/map-the-meal-gap/2013/NY_AllCounties_CDs_MMG_2013.pdf)).

The Department of Education is making real strides in improving the school food experience - as an advocate of increased agency procurement of locally sourced products, I am especially a big fan of New York Thursdays, which highlights NY State produce and dairy. In addition, the Council and Administration deserve much credit for funding the expansion of the Universal School Meal (USM) program in middle schools. Simply put - when children are hungry, they cannot learn. USM has registered success in the increasing numbers of children eating at school, and it's essential for New York City to expand this program in all schools to narrow the meal gap that persists throughout the five boroughs.

As the sponsor of the City's Open Data Law, I am a firm believer in the importance of data transparency and the essential role that data plays in helping electeds, academics, advocates and stakeholders in shaping informed and engaged public policy. The report mandated in Int 773A would provide insight into the successes for bridging food access, as well as identifying the challenges left to overcome.

I would like to recommend that the bill be amended to also include participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). While the summer meals sites are not exclusively located in school buildings, the program is operated by the DOE and

therefore it shouldn't be a hardship to also include information from the sites located at NYCHA developments, parks, recreation centers and pools.

Related, I request that the Education Committee consider Int 461-2014, which I am proud to have introduced with my friend and colleague Council Member Jimmy Vacca. This bill would require the NYC Department of Education to widely publicize summer meal site information by June 1 of each year. Many of the food advocates here today, who are tireless in their efforts, will tell you that one of the main reasons parents routinely identify for not participating in the completely free summer meal program is that they don't know where to go with their children. For the past two years, my office has designed and distributed colorful fliers with specific meal site information for each Manhattan Community School District. These fliers, in English, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic were then distributed to schools, libraries, parks, NYCHA developments and senior centers by my staff and volunteers while school was still in session. Two years ago the DOE released this information during the first week of June, but subsequently the information was released - frankly speaking - too little and too late.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.