



NEWS FROM  
**Gale A. Brewer**  
MANHATTAN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

---

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: May 29, 2014

Contact: Stephanie Hoo, 212-669-3539, [shoo@manhattanbp.nyc.gov](mailto:shoo@manhattanbp.nyc.gov)

## **BREWER: URGENT REFORMS NEEDED IN CITY'S SUMMER FOOD PROGRAM FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN**

New York, N.Y. – Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer and children's advocates today called on the Department of Education to significantly improve outreach and delivery of its summer food program for schoolchildren as a way to combat hunger in New York.

“For too long, the City’s summer food program for school kids has been riddled with incomplete information, lack of comprehensive site planning, and without strong inter-agency coordination when it should be a front-line effort in combating hunger,” Brewer said. “Logistics for locations are provided too late, especially for many parents and grandparents. Last year, sites and dates were announced on June 25 – just two days before the program began. New York must do better, and this summer presents the opportunity for a re-set on summer meals.”

The City’s summer food program provides free and nutritious breakfasts and lunches to children at sites across the City and is a critical resource in the fight against hunger – especially for families who benefit from reduced price and free meals during the school year.

Yet, according to the Food Bank for New York City’s 2013 Hunger Safety Net report, only one-third of emergency food program participants reported that their children participated in the summer food program. The most commonly-cited reason for not participating was they did not know about it.

“The Amsterdam Houses Residents Association hosted the summer meal program in the past, but we closed due to low participation,” said **Margarita Curet, president of the NYCHA Amsterdam Houses Resident Association**. “This year, I plan to apply for Amsterdam Houses to offer the program but we need the City’s help in reaching out to parents and grandparents: at home, at the local senior center, and in the classroom – PS 191 is located nearby, but notices need to be given to children now, before summer vacation.”

“For years, New York City has been lagging in participation in vital child nutrition programs, including in summer meals,” said **Joel Berg, executive director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger**. “We are greatly encouraged that the de Blasio Administration is committed to reversing those trends. Borough President Brewer has proposed practical, concrete ways to increase summer meals participation at little or low cost to the City. As always, she is combining common sense with a progressive vision. We hope that the City is able to implement some of these recommendations immediately and all of them in future summers. Child hunger doesn’t take a summer vacation, and neither should our efforts to end it.”

“This underutilized federal food program meets only 15 percent of the eligible NYC children who need access to nutritious meals in the summer when school is out,” said **Liz Accles, executive director of Community Food Advocates**.

Brewer was joined by advocates in calling for urgent reforms:

**1) By June 1, all confirmed locations and dates should be made publicly available and accessible via 311, NYCHA’s Customer Contact Center, nyc.gov, schools, after-school programs, libraries, and recreation centers.**

The Department of Education has expressed concern with sharing incomplete information, as some sites and dates may change, but:

The DOE site currently says that the program will operate from June 27-August 29, with an asterisk that notes that these dates are subject to change. The same can be done with a list of locations and dates, and updated with the most current information.

Many programs run from the same locations each year, such as school cafeterias, NYCHA community rooms, parks and pools.

Site specific information in particular is needed so that partners, including teachers, parent associations, Community Education Councils, Community Boards, neighborhood nonprofits, advocates and electeds can further outreach and in multiple languages.

The Department for the Aging, Human Resources Administration and Department of Homeless Services should also be engaged in outreach efforts.

**2) The Office of School Food should work more closely with NYCHA to expand site participation and outreach.**

NYCHA summer meal sites are open to all New Yorkers, starting July 8 – as such, the dates and hours of operation for each site should be available via the 311 and NYCHA Customer Contact Center systems.

Last year, approximately 80 sites were operated in NYCHA facilities citywide. According to NYCHA, their goal is to open and staff 80 sites this year and they have 32

confirmed sites, as of last week. If NYCHA is unable to open all 80 sites, DOE should expand capacity at existing sites.

Each site must meet specific criteria including having a bathroom on site, refrigeration, and a working sink, among others. Several Manhattan Tenant Association Presidents have told the Borough President's Office that they applied to be a site, were deemed ineligible following an inspection – but were never provided with an explanation nor information on how they could meet the requirements.

NYCHA and the Office of School Food should send a targeted mailing to all families with children, listing the nearest Summer Meal sites in their area, dates and hours of operation.

**3) By following these recommendations, together we can still make this summer a success; This summer is an opportunity to re-set the City's summer meal program, through data collection, identifying best practices, early planning and outreach.**

The Department of Education should collect site participation information over the course of the summer. In line with the Open Data Law that Brewer sponsored as a member of the City Council, DOE should then make this information publically available and easily accessible online.

In September, a Summer Meal Task Force should be convened including representatives of the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, Department of Education, NYC Housing Authority and Tenant Associations, Human Resources Administration, Department of Homeless Services, Department of Parks and Recreation, Department of Health, the public library systems, community food and hunger advocates, Borough Presidents, and the New York City Council among others.

The Task Force will be charged with studying the previous summer meal program data and other factors including:

*Where do "Food Deserts" Exist?* For instance, in 2013, there were no open summer meal program sites located between West 93 Street and West 23 Street, in Manhattan (despite the presence of NYCHA developments, public libraries, parks department recreation center and other possible locations).

*What Barriers Exist to Participation?* In 2013, some school sites were reportedly restricted rather than open to all participants. The Task Force should look at what – if any – restrictions should be used for program sites and expand sites wherever possible.

*What Creative Ways Can We Increase Participation?:* SchoolFood already deploys three mobile food trucks which visit beaches, parks, and playgrounds throughout the city and we need to expand on these creative methods of connecting kids with summer meals.

*How Can We Best Source from Local Ingredients?* The summer meal programs feature salad, fruit and milk – all things that New York farms, whether upstate or downstate, produce. Locally grown food, which requires shorter farm-to-table transportation time, retains more of its nutritional values and supports our local economy.

###