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THE COUNCIL  
OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
**MARK TREYGER**

**CHAIR**

EDUCATION

**COMMITTEES**

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GENERAL WELFARE

LAND USE

OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

November 12, 2020

Dear Mayor de Blasio, Chancellor Carranza, and DYCD Commissioner Bill Chong:

As we prepare for winter and colder days, it is crucial to make sure our students are receiving appropriate meals. Our students deserve to have an option for hot meals that are culturally appropriate and nutritionally sound. These meals should be available at schools, Learning Bridges, Learning Labs, and other relevant locales.

Our city should be doing everything possible to make sure our kids feel supported in this uncertain time—and that includes making sure our students are getting adequate nutrition. As we have long learned from our school food program, ensuring that kids are eating what they need to grow and thrive is not just a matter of nutritional balance: food also needs to be appetizing, and menus need to be diverse. Expecting students to eat the same cold prepared meals day after day—with as few as three rotating menu options for children with dietary restrictions—is a recipe for adverse academic and behavioral options, as kids choose to skip meals rather than eating what is being provided.

The City diligently created a plan to provide hot meals for seniors, and it should do the same to provide appropriate meal options for children. Having nutritious and culturally appropriate food is a matter of dignity for New Yorkers of all ages.

My office has received numerous complaints from families about inadequate food options, which is contributing to food insecurity concerns. This is not an insurmountable task, but one that would go a long way to better meet the needs of our kids and families especially as we head into a very concerning phase of this pandemic. I have also heard from numerous educators, administrators, and nonprofits about food waste and social-emotional challenges resulting from our inability to meet children's desire for hot food. Many have even dug into their own pockets, or relied on private funding to meet their students' needs.

In school buildings, the Department of Education should work with its labor partners, particularly DC37, to try to identify safe ways to provide hot food options for students on their in-person days. The Department of Education retains and has recently approved contracts with suppliers of

prepared menu items that are designed to be served hot, and children should be able to access these options, if they can be provided safely.

For Learning Labs and Learning Bridges providers, particularly those which serve significant populations with dietary restrictions, many already provide hot meals to other age populations which they serve, including early childhood. The current approach, which requires these providers to collect meals from existing distribution sites, has been plagued by quality issues (in addition to the lack of variety, concerns have been raised around expired and frozen food) and does not appropriately compensate providers for these logistics. A more reasonable and appropriate approach, both for providers and for the children they serve, would be to enable them to leverage their existing catering capacity to provide culturally appropriate, nutritious hot meals to Learning Labs and Learning Bridges students. The existing model may have made sense as the City rushed to stand up these programs, but it is simply unsustainable for providers and for children.

While we face many pressing issues, ensuring that children are receiving adequate nutrition is critical among them. Students' access to the comfort and nutrition that a hot meal provides should not be dependent on private fundraising and individual charity. Students can't learn if they are hungry, and we must make sure we are providing meals that are on par with the lunches students can receive during a typical school year.

If the City truly cares about equity for all students, we must make sure to do right by our students.

Thank you for taking this into consideration.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Treyger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Council Member Mark Treyger, Chairman of the Education Committee