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**MAYOR ADAMS AND CHANCELLOR BANKS ANNOUNCE EXPANSION OF
CAFETERIA ENHANCEMENT EXPERIENCE**

CEE Initiative Will Transform More Than 80 School Cafeterias in the Next Year

*City Also Announces Commitment to Expanding Access to Halal Food in Schools, Fulfilling Key
Commitment From Mayor Adams*

NEW YORK – New York City Mayor Eric Adams and New York City Department of Education Chancellor David C. Banks today announced the expansion of the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience (CEE), as part of the city’s reimagining of the student dining experience and city’s ongoing commitment to health and nutrition. With an additional \$50 million in capital funding in Fiscal Year 2023, the CEE initiative will transform more than 80 cafeterias into warm and welcoming spaces for students to enjoy nutritious meals.

Today’s announcement also included a doubling down of the city’s commitment to expanding access to halal options to schools across New York City, fulfilling a key commitment of Mayor Adams. If any school communities are interested in an extended halal menu, their school principal will work with the entire school community and the Islamic Leadership Council of New York to add the service to the respective site.

“The classroom isn’t the only place in a school building where a child learns. After two years of the pandemic, we realize how important it is for students to be able to socialize and interact with each other in a comfortable setting over a healthy, culturally appropriate meal,” said **Mayor Adams**. “That’s why we are proud to announce a \$50 million investment this school year to upgrade more than 80 lunchrooms under the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience and double down on our commitment to providing halal options for all schools who want them. This is just another step we’re taking to ensure our schools are places where every child feels seen and heard — where all children, no matter their background or ability, can learn inside and outside of the classroom, and grow into well-rounded and emotionally secure adults. I’m grateful to our school communities, food service workers, and all the New Yorkers working to feed, nurture, and take care of every one of our kids.”

“Each day, hundreds of thousands of students rely on schools to provide nourishing and nutritious meals. When our students are well fed and taken care of, they perform better in the

classroom and are more likely to make healthy decisions later in life, which is why it is so important that our cafeterias are welcoming environments,” said **Schools Chancellor David C. Banks**. “The Cafeteria Enhancement Experience transforms the student dining experience, turning cafeterias into gathering places for our students, and I’m grateful even more of our students will have the chance to enjoy these spaces in the coming year.”

“Creating a food environment that is culturally inclusive and easier for students to make a healthy choice is a major responsibility of the city,” said **Mayor’s Office of Food Policy Executive Director Kate MacKenzie**. “The Cafeteria Enhancement Experience stimulates meal participation and leads to greater consumption of fruits and vegetables. I look forward to the continued equitable expansion of this program to ensure our kids are provided with nutritious meals to support academic success.”

The Cafeteria Enhancement Experience initiative is centered around four core pillars:

1. *Student choice*: Enhanced cafeterias feature a variety of ways to consume whole fruits, vegetables, snacks, or fresh-cut produce from salad bars.
2. *Fast service*: Students won’t have to wait on line for meals, leaving more time to relax and unwind with classmates.
3. *Modern style*: The CEE initiative redesigns cafeteria with an emphasis on creating a warm and welcoming environment.
4. *New furniture*: Comfortable tables and chairs welcome students to their new space.

Middle and high schools that receive a cafeteria enhancement are identified by a range of factors, including enrollment and participation at that site, with an emphasis on schools in neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and older school buildings. Design decisions regarding the cafeteria redesigns are made in partnership with individual school leadership.

“The expansion of the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience is a great effort to enrich our students’ school lunch experience, and I thank the mayor and chancellor for their continued work to improve our kids’ health and nutrition,” said **U.S. Representative Grace Meng**. “I am particularly excited about the city’s commitment to expand halal options as part of this initiative. In Congress, I have worked to champion efforts that would provide increased access to halal food. It is critical for students to have lunch options that adhere to their dietary restrictions to ensure that no child goes hungry, and I will continue to keep up the fight to make it more readily available here in my home city and across the country.”

“It’s critical that we invest in our children, every facet of their education, as they grow. The Cafeteria Enhancement Experience will do just that,” said **New York State Senator Andrew Gounardes**. “By expanding and bettering their cafeteria experience, we are setting them up to live a healthy life and learn how to do so. In addition, I’m thrilled that Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks will be expanding the halal food program, which will benefit so many students across the city.”

“I applaud Mayor Adams and Chancellor David Bank for implementing the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience, especially including expanding access to halal options in schools,”

said **New York State Assemblymember William Colton**. “Many Muslim families are forced to send children with their own lunches since the children cannot eat the regular school lunches. This will greatly improve the children’s learning by providing Muslim children with a nourishing halal menu that they are able to eat.”

“I’m very pleased to see this \$50 million investment in the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience CEE, as well as the expansion of access to halal food options in our schools,” said **New York State Assemblymember David Weprin**. “Quality nutrition is closely linked to a quality learning environment — our students must have the food they need to ensure they can focus and learn in school. Fast, nutritious school meals are a crucial lifeline for many families who struggle financially, and we must continue to invest in our cafeterias. My district is home to people of many faiths, including many who practice Islam, and these expanded halal options will mean even more access to food and better learning for these students. I want to thank the mayor’s office and the Department of Education for their commitment to this path.”

“Unfortunately for many students, school lunch is the only meal they may have for the entire day,” said **New York State Assemblymember Alicia Hyndman**. “With the expansion of the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience, the commitment to provide healthier and nutritious meals will greatly benefit students moving forward. Also, expanding halal food options only reflects the support both Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks have for all students to enjoy their eating spaces and options.”

“As the first Muslim elected to state office representing the North Shore of Staten Island, Lower Manhattan, and Brooklyn and sponsor of state legislation to expand access of halal food for our students, I commend the city administration for their efforts in the expansion of the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience that will provide halal options in schools across the city,” said **New York State Assemblymember Charles D. Fall**.

“For many students, New York City public schools are the only guarantee of a daily meal,” said **New York State Assemblymember Khaleel M. Anderson**. “As we fight to break the stigma around food insecurity and hunger, we must ensure that our children have healthy and nutritious foods, to not only to fill their bellies but also to support their physiological, behavioral, emotional, and academic growth and well-being. I commend Mayor Adams, Chancellor Banks, and the entire administration for expanding access to healthy and culturally responsive food choices that will now include halal options for students across my district and citywide.”

“Our city’s food policies must be inclusive of all New Yorkers. Today, we advance that goal by expanding halal dining options in our school cafeterias,” said **New York State Assemblymember Jenifer Rajkumar**. “For years, Muslim-American advocates have called for this expansion, and I applaud Mayor Adams for getting it done. Now, over 100,000 Muslim-American children in our school system will receive a nutritious lunch that meets their dietary requirements. I hold halal food distributions regularly, and each time, hundreds of people turn out for food relief that conforms to their faith. I am proud to partner with the mayor and Muslim-American leaders to ensure that the food offerings in our cafeterias reflect the diversity of our city. In addition, today’s \$50 million investment in the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience initiative will give our children a cafeteria that is warm and welcoming. I look forward to working with the mayor to continue to build a city that honors our ‘gorgeous mosaic,’ nurtures our children, and ensures New Yorkers of every faith are food secure.”

“New York City students deserve to enjoy fresh food and nourishing meals every day,” said **New York City Council Speaker Adrienne Adams**. “As a city, we also have a responsibility to provide culturally and religiously appropriate food, including kosher and halal meals, in schools where there is need. Today’s announcement of the expanded Cafeteria Enhancement Experience is welcome news and an important step towards creating learning and social environments that benefit all students.”

“All our kids — regardless of their socioeconomic status, ZIP code, or background — deserve not only the best possible dining experience in school, but also access to appropriate meals that match their religious or cultural beliefs,” said **Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.** “It’s well past time our city achieves those goals by enhancing our cafeterias and adding halal food to the menu, which many Muslim families across Queens have sought for years. I look forward to working with the mayor and chancellor to expand this program even further.”

“Schools can be centers of joy, community, and friendship, but only when we create the environments to support that vision,” said **Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso**. “I’m so thrilled that some New York City students will soon be able to make new friends and enjoy their meals in transformed and renovated cafeterias, and I’m especially excited that schools will have greater opportunities to fill that cafeteria with halal foods so that more of our students can find the foods at school that make them feel at home. Thank you to Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks for working together on behalf of New York City students. I look forward to seeing these efforts grow and expand so every child in every community can share in the benefits of a happy cafeteria full of nutritious, culturally relevant foods.”

“Nutritious, culturally sensitive, delicious food must be a priority for New Yorkers. A robust dining experience includes high-quality cafeterias,” said **New York City Councilmember Rita Joseph, chair, Committee on Education**. “In collaboration with the mayor, chancellor, and Speaker Adams, I will continue to fight to make sure that every single New York City public school student is able to eat well in our city.”

“I would like to praise Mayor Eric Adams and Chancellor David Banks for this bold initiative and \$50 million investment into the Cafeteria Enhancement Experience, so our students would be able to enjoy healthy and nutritional meals,” said **New York City Councilmember Ari Kagan**. “I am also excited that our schools would be able to provide halal food to students. For years, I have joined many activists in our Muslim and Jewish communities in advocating for a halal and kosher food options in public schools. Today’s investment is an important step into the right direction in our diverse city.”

“Our student population is ever-growing in its diversity. It is important that all students’ dietary restrictions are met, especially when those needs are based in religion,” said **New York City Councilmember JoAnn Ariola**. “Serving halal meals, as opposed to a vegetarian option, is a way of continuing our promise to provide healthy and equitable options when addressing our immigrant population and ending food insecurity.”

“Our schools are a melting pot of cultures, and the food served to our students should reflect that,” said **New York City Councilmember Marjorie Velázquez**. “In communities like mine, which includes Little Yemen, I’m excited for students to have culturally sensitive meals. The

new addition to the cafeteria will also create a more welcoming environment, focusing on inclusion, which is a win for thousands of students in New York City.”

“I am thrilled that New York will expand access to halal food on schools. Halal food is important to Muslim students and their families,” said **New York City Councilmember Nantasha Williams**. “This is an important step for educating students in a way that respects their religion and beliefs and also helps them feel included and welcome in their own schools.”

“When our children eat lunch at school, they deserve to have culturally competent meals that meet their needs,” said **New York City Councilmember Julie Won**. “Providing halal lunches for our Muslim students and also expanding the selection of whole fruits and vegetables will ensure that every child in our public schools will have access to healthy and nutritious food. Thank you to Mayor Adams and the Department of Education for investing in our students’ health and well-being.”

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