



**Regional
Food Bank**
OF NORTHEASTERN NEW YORK

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MEMBER OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**

Hon. Joanne Cunningham
Chair, Albany Country Legislature
Harold L. Joyce Albany County Office Building
112 State Street, Room 710 | Albany, NY 12207

Dear Ms. Cunningham:

I write in support of the Albany Fund for Education's (AFE) application for Albany County ARPA funds to fight food insecurity in the Albany City School District by expanding the network of school-based food pantries in the district.

AFE has been a long-standing partner of the Regional Food Bank in our efforts to ensure that students have access to the healthy food they need to be able to learn and succeed in school. AFE helped start the *Feed and Read* weekend backpack program in Albany, has provided summer weekend food support for district families for the past four years, and – with assistance from an Albany County Legislature grant – has already brought full-service food pantries to the district's three middle schools and the Albany International Center.

"Full-service" food pantries have refrigerators and freezers as well as secure storage for dry goods, ensuring that students and families have access to the healthy fresh produce, meat, and dairy products which are often difficult to find in our food desert neighborhoods. AFE also provides support so that food pantry coordinators can work with their refugee and immigrant families to identify and purchase culturally specific food from local ethnic groceries to stock in their pantries. This facet of their program helps to strengthen connections between schools and newcomer families and provide a reassuring "taste of home" to students who are navigating an entirely new culture.

The Children's Programs department at the Regional Food Bank works with 27 school pantries in ten Albany County school districts. In addition to the Albany City School District and charter schools located in the City of Albany, the Food Bank supports pantries in Cohoes, Guilderland, Menands, North Colonie, Ravena and Voorheesville. The Food Bank also supports weekend Backpack programs in Berne-Knox-Westerlo, Cohoes, Green Island, North Colonie, Ravena and Watervliet, as well as at Northern Rivers and St. Anne's Institute. Part of AFE's ARPA grant will fund a convening of staff from all Albany County districts that provide school-based food support to their students, as well as any districts that are considering launching such programs. The Regional Food Bank is excited to be a part of this initiative, which will share best practices for connecting with students and families, making services accessible, and increasing the nutritional content of the food schools provide to their families.

If funded, this project will substantially increase access to healthy food for students and families in the City School District of Albany and Albany County.

Sincerely,

Betsy Dickson
Director of Children's Programs