

How to qualify for free, reduced lunch in Stamford schools

By [Sophie Vaughan](#) Updated 4:25 pm EDT, Tuesday, August 20, 2019



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Albertina Chibalan-Pastor of Stamford, hugs her daughter Ariana as she looks at literature with Maria Olivia while signing up for a free or reduced lunch program on Aug. 7, 2019 at the Stamford Government
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STAMFORD — Newly released guidelines show the income requirements to receive free and reduced-price meals at school have gone up slightly.

Last year, a student in Stamford qualified for free meals if she was an only child and her family made an annual gross income at or below \$15,782. For each additional child in the family, the income eligibility increased by \$5,616 to the point where a family with four kids needed to make at or below \$32,630 in order for each of the children to qualify for free meals.

For the upcoming school year, those families have a bit more room to qualify for the program.

A family with one child now making at or below \$16,237 will qualify for free food and for each additional child that number increases by \$5,746.

The guidelines, published this week by Stamford Public Schools, are mandated by the state, which itself adopted the requirements from the federal Department of Agriculture's Income Eligibility Guidelines.

The announced guidelines follow a [Stamford Advocate article](#) that revealed a five percent increase in the number of students registered for free or reduced lunch over four years.

From 2014 to 2017, 52 percent of Stamford Public School students were registered for free and reduced lunch, but last year that number jumped to 57 percent, according to school district data.

In a district that last year served 15,974 students, the five percent increase represents 799 more students who benefited from free or reduced lunch.

Like free meals, the guidelines for reduced price breakfast and lunch also changed for the upcoming school year.

Last year a family with one child had to make at or below an annual gross income of \$22,459 to qualify for reduced lunch, but this year that number moved to \$23,107 and for each additional child that number increases by \$8,177.

That means a family with four children would qualify for reduced meals if they make at or below \$47,638 per year.

Reduced-price meals cost 40 cents for lunch and 30 cents for breakfast whereas a full-price lunch costs \$2.85 in elementary, \$3.10 in middle, and \$3.20 in high school each day.

For many families in Stamford, the financial impact of free or reduced school meals is huge.

According to the [2018 ALICE Report](#) published by Connecticut United Ways, 42 percent of Stamford's population is considered Asset-Limited, Income Constrained and Employed (ALICE), which means that their income falls below the cost of living in the city.

"We know that school nutrition programs are critical for low-income families," said Cara Mitchell, who works as the food policy manager for the United Way of Western Connecticut. "Free and reduced-price meals help families stretch limited budgets and provide nutritious meals to students since they have to follow USDA federal nutrition guidelines."

For those who meet the guidelines, [applications for free and reduced meals](#) are available on the fifth floor of Stamford Government Center. Students in families that receive assistance from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or the Temporary Family Assistance (TFA) program are directly enrolled for free lunch and do not need to fill out an application.

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