Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Free and Reduced-price School Meals in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP)

School Year 2026-2027

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Children need healthy meals to learn and eating a nutritious school breakfast and lunch has been shown to support students' academic success, wellness, and physical well-being. Manchester Public Schools offers healthy meals every school day. For school year (SY) 2026-2027, breakfast is free of charge for all students enrolled in schools participating in the School Breakfast Program. Lunch will cost $3.85 for grades PK-4 and $4.35 for grades 5-8 at St. Bridget, St. James, and Odyssey Community School. Additionally, your children may qualify for either free or reduced-price meals and for SY 2026-2027, students eligible for reduced-price school meals will receive one breakfast and one lunch per school day free of charge.

This packet includes an application for free and reduced-price school meal benefits and detailed instructions on how to complete the form. If you prefer to watch a video tutorial on how to complete the form, please watch the Connecticut State Department of Education's 20-minute video, How to Fill Out the Application for Free and Reduced-price Meals or Free Milk and Summer EBT. (https://vimeo.com/777367788)

Note: Children receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), HUSKY A (Medicaid), or Summer EBT (S-EBT) benefits *may* be eligible for free meals without having to complete and submit the free or reduced-price school meals application. Some children who receive HUSKY A or S-EBT benefits *may* be eligible for *reduced-price* school meals instead of free school meals based on household income.[1] Questions regarding SNAP/TFA/HUSKY A and direct certification should be sent to the determining official**,** Doreen Ruggiero, 860-647-3462.

If you have received a Notice of Direct Certification for free or reduced-price school meals, **do not** complete the application unless instructed to do so by the district. Let the school know if any children in your household are **not** listed on the **Notice of Direct Certification** letter you received, since free or reduced-price school meal benefits are extended to all children in a household when at least one child in the household is confirmed as directly certified for free or reduced-price school meals.

[1] Some children receiving HUSKY A may not qualify for either free or reduced-price school meals based on household income.

Additionally, all school-aged children in income-eligible households can receive school meal benefits regardless of a child's immigration status and the district/school does not release information for immigration-related purposes in the usual course of operating the Child Nutrition Programs.

The Manchester Public Schools complies with the federal requirements for meal modifications for children with special dietary needs. The requirements for meal modifications are different for children with and without disabilities. For more information, please contact the food service director, Elisha Feenstra at 860-647-3462.

The answers to the common questions below can help you with the application process.

1. **Who can get free or reduced-price meals**?

   - All children in households receiving SNAP or TFA benefits are eligible for free meals. Note: *Some* students receiving HUSKY A (Medicaid) or S-EBT benefits are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

   - **Foster children that are under the legal responsibility of a foster care agency or court are eligible for free meals. (Note:** A foster child is categorically eligible for free meals and may be included as a member of the foster family if the foster family chooses to also apply for benefits for other children. Including children in foster care as household members may help other children in the household qualify for benefits. If non-foster children in a foster family are not eligible for free or reduced-price meal benefits, an eligible foster child will still receive free benefits.)

   - **Children participating in their school's Head Start program are eligible for free meals.**

   - Children who meet the definition of homeless or runaway are eligible for free meals.

   - Children may receive free or reduced-price meals if your household's income is within the limits of the Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines. Your children may qualify for free or reduced-price meals if your household income falls at or below the limits on this chart:

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Federal Reduced Eligibility Income Chart (Effective July 1, 2026, to June 30, 2027)

Household size	Yearly	Monthly	Weekly
1	29,526	2,461	568
2	40,034	3,337	770
3	50,542	4,212	972
4	61,050	5,088	1,175
5	71,558	5,964	1,377
6	82,066	6,839	1,579
7	92,574	7,715	1,781
8	103,082	8,591	1,983
Each additional family member	10,508	876	203

2. **How do I know if my children qualify as homeless or runaway?** *Do* the members of your household lack a permanent address? Are you staying together in a shelter, hotel, or other temporary housing arrangement? Does your family relocate on a seasonal basis? Are any children living with you who have chosen to leave their prior family or household? If you believe children in your household meet these descriptions and you have not been told your children will get free meals, please call or email Jim Farrell at 860-647-3330 or email b11jfarr@mpspride.org.

3. **Do I need to fill out an application for each child**? No. Use ***one*** *Free and Reduced-price School Meals Application for all students in your household.* We cannot approve an application that is not complete, so be sure to fill out all required information. Return the completed application to Food Service Department, 448 Tolland Tnpk., Bldg. 1, Manchester, CT 06042**.** For a video tutorial on how to complete the application, please refer to How to Fill Out the Application for Free and Reduced-price Meals or Free Milk and Summer EBT. (https://vimeo.com/777367788)

4. **Should I fill out an application if I received a letter this school year saying my children are already approved for free or reduced-price meals?** No, but please read the letter carefully and follow the instructions. If any children in your household were missing from your eligibility notification, contact Food Service Department **Ph. 860-647-3462 or email** efeenstra@mpspride.org immediately.

5. **Can I apply online?** Yes. You are encouraged to complete the electronic online application instead of a paper application if your district has an online application. The

online application has the same requirements and will ask you for the same information as the paper application. Visit **ezmealapp.com** to begin or to learn more about the online application process. Contact Food Service Department, 448 Tolland Tnpk., Bldg. 1, Manchester, CT 06042, or call 860-647-3462 if you have any questions about the online application.

6. **My child's application was approved last year. Do I need to fill out a new one?** Yes. Your child's application is only good for that school year and for up to 30 operating days into the new school year (or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever comes first); this is referred to as the "carryover period." When the carryover period ends, unless you are notified that your children are directly certified or you submit an application that is approved, your children's meals must be claimed at the paid rate. Though encouraged to do so, the LEA is not required to send a reminder or a notice of expired eligibility.

7. **I have not submitted an application within the past three years. Do I need to fill out a new one?** Yes. Your child's application is only good for that school year and for up to 30 operating days into the new school year (or until a new eligibility determination is made, whichever comes first). When the carryover period ends, unless you are notified that your children are directly certified or you submit an application that is approved, your children's meals must be claimed at the paid rate of For the school year 2026-2027, Children may buy lunch for Grades PK-4 for $3.85, and Grades 5-8 for $4.35. Though encouraged to do so, the LEA is not required to send a reminder or a notice of expired eligibility.

8. **I receive WIC. Can my children get free meals?** Children in households participating in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) **may** be eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Please complete and submit a *Free and Reduced-price School Meals Application*.

9. ***Will the information I give be checked?*** Yes. We may also ask you to send written proof of the household income you report.

10. ***If I don't qualify now, may I apply later?*** Yes, you may apply at any time during the school year. For example, children with a parent or guardian who becomes unemployed may become eligible for free and reduced-price school meals if the household income drops below the income threshold.

11. ***What if I disagree with the school's decision about my application?*** You should talk to school officials. You also may ask for a hearing by calling or writing Dr. Amy Radikas, Assistant Superintendent, 45 North School St., Manchester, CT 06042, email: aradikas@mpspride.org.

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12. ***May I apply if someone in my household is not a U.S. citizen?*** Yes. You, your children, or other household members do not have to be U.S. citizens to apply for free or reduced-price school meals.

13. ***What if my income is not always the same?*** List the amount that you **normally** receive. For example, if you normally make $1,000 each month, but you missed some work last month and only made $900, put down that you made $1,000 per month. If you normally get overtime, include it, but do not include it if you only work overtime sometimes. If you have lost a job or had your hours or wages reduced, use your current income.

14. **What if some household members have no income to report?** Household members may not receive some types of income we ask you to report on the application or may not receive income at all. When this happens, please write "0" in the field. However, if any income fields are left empty or blank, those will **also** be counted as zero. Please be careful when leaving the income fields blank, as we will assume you **meant** to do so.

15. **We are in the military. Do we report our income differently**? Your basic pay and cash bonuses must be reported as income. If you get any cash value allowances for off-base housing, food or clothing, or receive Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance payments, these must also be included as income. However, if your housing is part of the Military Housing Privatization Initiative, do not include your housing allowance as income. Any additional combat pay resulting from deployment is also excluded from income.

16. **What if there isn't enough space on the application for my family?** List any additional household members on a separate piece of paper and attach it to your application. Contact Food Service Department**, Ph. 860-647-3462 or email** efeenstra@mpspride.org to receive a second application.

17. **My family needs more help. Are there other programs we might apply for?** To find out how to apply for SNAP, TFA, HUSKY A, S-EBT, or WIC benefits contact United Way's free referral number **2-1-1** (free call, statewide).

If you have other questions or need help, call 860-647-3462.

Sincerely,
Elisha Feenstra
Food Service Director

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In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity.

Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339.

To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ad-3027.pdf, from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by:

1. mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
   Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
   1400 Independence Avenue, SW
   Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
3. email: program.intake@usda.gov

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