



# The Public Schools of Brookline

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## **Financial Assistance Program Overview 2020-2021 School Year**

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In 2016, the School Committee authorized a centralized application process to provide families with financial assistance for certain school related fees. The program provides a prorated subsidy for households earning less than 350% of the US Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines. The United States Department of Agriculture uses these guidelines to determine the Free and Reduced Lunch eligible income levels. The tables of income levels provided in this document are based on the United States Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines posted on their website <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/01/17/2020-00858/annual-update-of-the-hhs-poverty-guidelines>

The Superintendent will provide a centralized financial assistance application process for families seeking relief from various school-related fees and/or charges. Eligibility will be renewed or updated through an annual application process.

Financial Assistance will be offered to meet any PSB student fees or charges, including those for Athletics, Instrumental Music, and other program and field trip fees. Other fees include but are not limited to curriculum-based field trip expenses, Brookline Early Education Program (BEEP), School Department Summer Programs, and other fees the school department may charge as a result of curriculum requirements.

The program goals are as follows:

1. Implement an objective financial assistance program and application process for all students and families;
2. Allow families a single point of contact and determination within the school district; and
3. Adhere to a standard of confidentiality throughout the district.

Submitted financial information shall follow USDA Free and Reduced Lunch Guidelines and related state privacy laws in the collection, handling, and disseminating of information regarding the financial status of students.

### **Application Process and Timeline**

Financial Assistance Applications are available for each school year after May 1st. The application is available online and copies are available from the Office of Student Affairs or the Office of Administration and Finance. Families should continue to register according to posted program deadlines to ensure that should the application not be granted, the lowest fee is still available.

Applications are processed by the Office of Administration and Finance throughout the school year as they are submitted. Due to the volume of applications at registration periods and the information required, it can take up to four weeks or more to have an application processed from start to final notification of parents and the program for which they are seeking the waiver. Every effort is made to process these applications as quickly as possible.

Steps:

- 1) Complete the application and provide copies of documentation requested. Income and financial support must be documented (copies can be made for you at the Office of Administration and Finance);

- 2) Submit completed form to the Office of Administration and Finance;
- 3) Determination is made by the Office of Administration and Finance;
- 4) The Office of Administration and Finance completes notification by letter to the family, school principal, and programs.

Due to the nature of the applications process, we do not take into account mortgage payments, property value (unless zero income is reported), college tuitions, or household expenses.

**Program Eligibility and Determination for Participation**

1. Principals, Guidance/School Counselors, and all other employees are prohibited from making a determination of financial need outside of the Superintendent’s established process.
2. Families in the United States on an active Visa are not eligible for financial assistance.<sup>1</sup>
3. Eligibility shall only be determined by the Office of Administration and Finance.
4. The Homeless Liaison shall maintain a list and provide an update as necessary to the School Business Administrator of all students who have been determined to qualify for services under McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.<sup>2</sup>
5. The Public Schools of Brookline School Committee has made the following determination for income eligibility for financial assistance:<sup>3</sup>

Determination Status	Income Level over Poverty Guideline for Household Income	Households will pay
Approved for Free	<200%	\$0 program fee
McKinney-Vento Homeless Determination		\$0 program fee
Foster Care (individual only)		\$0 program fee
75% Reduction of Fee	201% - 300%	25% of the program fee
50% Reduction of Fee	301% - 350%	50% of the program fee

\* % above HHS Poverty Guidelines

The income distribution is based on the statistics of the number of households who are on the margin of economic stability and recognition of the high housing costs and property tax in Brookline. A table is provided for the income levels that apply in each category for each household size

<sup>1</sup> “The purpose of the form is to show that you have the financial means to live in the United States without needing welfare or financial benefits from the U.S. government. The law requires that the sponsor demonstrate that he or she is able to assist you financially. The sponsor must show that he or she has an annual income of not less than 125 percent of the federal poverty level. The federal poverty guidelines are set once a year, and can be found on Form I-864P, Poverty Guidelines.” <https://www.uscis.gov/green-card/green-card-processes-and-procedures/public-charge>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.clcm.org/McKinney-Vento.html>

<sup>3</sup> The Financial Assistance program shall use the US Department of Health and Human Services poverty guidelines and expand it by a multiplier to better match our community’s income level and assist families that are above the Free and Reduced Lunch Guidelines with school fees that are assessed for a variety of activities. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/income-eligibility-guidelines>

2020 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia

Persons in family/ household	Poverty guideline	Free Lunch (130%)	Reduced Lunch (180%)	Brookline District Waiver	Free Family Waiver (200%)	Reduced Fee to 25% of Fee (300%)	Reduced Fee by 50% of Fee (350%)
1	\$12,760	\$16,588	\$22,968		\$25,520	\$38,280	\$44,660
2	\$17,240	\$22,412	\$31,032		\$34,480	\$51,720	\$60,340
3	\$21,720	\$28,236	\$39,096		\$43,440	\$65,160	\$76,020
4	\$26,200	\$34,060	\$47,160		\$52,400	\$78,600	\$91,700
5	\$30,680	\$39,884	\$55,224		\$61,360	\$92,040	\$107,380
6	\$35,160	\$45,708	\$63,288		\$70,320	\$105,480	\$123,060
7	\$39,640	\$51,532	\$71,352		\$79,280	\$118,920	\$138,740
8	\$44,120	\$57,356	\$79,416		\$88,240	\$132,360	\$154,420
SOURCE: Federal Register, Document Citation: 85 FR 3060, Friday, January 17, 2020							

**Exclusions**

The Financial Assistance Program does NOT apply to optional activities, including but not limited to student travel programs and senior prom.

At the Superintendent’s discretion, this Financial Assistance Program may be used to support qualified students in optional trips.

Optional activities that receive official sponsorship of the School Committee must comply with equitable access as determined by the School Committee for all students to participate.

**Determination of Income**

The Public Schools of Brookline Financial Assistance Program determines income based on the income of ALL household residents. Anyone living in your household is required to submit income documentation including domestic partners, relatives, and any other individuals residing at the address. The district has a single application procedure for all **school** fees for the full school year, with only school lunch being the exception. No employee, coach, or staff member has the authority to waive any fees or charges without the income determination letter provided by the Office of Administration and Finance.

Required documentation of household income includes but is not limited to the following:

1. **The Public Schools of Brookline requires financial assistance applicants to submit a copy of the IRS Federal Tax Return transcript.** The school district will no longer be accepting copies of form 1040, 1040A, or 1040EZ. Parents must obtain a **FREE** official Tax Return Transcript of their Federal Tax Return from the IRS for each of the wage earner, not filing jointly, residing the household.
  - a. 2019 Internal Revenue Service TRANSCRIPT, call 800-908-9946 or visit: <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/get-transcript>

2. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Disability Income;
3. Unemployment Compensation and Severance Pay;
4. Alimony and Child Support Agreements;
5. Transitional Assistance Letters and Benefits;
6. Brookline Housing Authority Income Determination Letter;
7. Section 8 Housing Voucher;
8. Foster Children are handled as one household and are not included as a member of the family in which they are residing or in the household income of the custodial parent;
9. Non-Custodial Parent income is considered when one parent receives the tax deduction for the dependent and there is no record of child support;
10. Valid Employment Contract if not paying taxes.

**If these documents cannot be provided, the Office of Administration and Finance will not be able to process your application and financial assistance will not be made available.**

### **Verification of Income**

The program will ask for and require documentation of income from parties who do not reside with the household that are providing financial support. Particularly if there is no documentation regarding the status of child support or death certificate or district knowledge of deceased parents. Guardianship and Foster Child status must also be provided if not already a matter of student record. Failure to provide documentation at the time of the application will delay the determination process. Your child will not be allowed to participate in any program until the documentation has been received by the Office of Administration and Finance.

### **Background of the Program**

The School Department undertook centralizing financial assistance applications for families seeking relief from various program fees. The program goals were as follows:

1. Implement an objective financial assistance program for all students and families;
2. Allow families a single point of contact and determination within the school district;
3. Adhere to a standard of confidentiality throughout the district;
4. Remove the Principal's Office and Guidance staff from making determinations of financial need using Free and Reduced Lunch applications, which violates the USDA School Lunch program.

Financial Assistance is offered system-wide and includes Athletics, and all other program and field trip fees. Other program fees include curriculum-based field trip expenses, Brookline Early Education Program (BEEP) tuition, and other fees the school department may charge as a result of curriculum requirements.

The Financial Assistance Program does *not* include optional field trips or student travel programs, including overnight trips. There is typically no funding source for scholarship for these programs due to the nature of each participant paying their own way. The program leaders for these optional student trips may know of a funding source that will be providing scholarship. However, if there is no funding source for assistance, the student is responsible for the full cost of the trip. The school department is not responsible for finding the financial assistance funds for the student if there are none readily available.

## **Other Financial Assistance available in Massachusetts**

**Department of Transitional Assistance:** Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP is the name for the Food Stamp Program. If you live in Massachusetts, you can apply for SNAP/Food Stamps online. <http://www.mass.gov/snap>. To get more information about SNAP/food stamp benefits and an application, call the Department of Transitional Assistance SNAP Benefits Hotline at 1-866-950-FOOD (3663). SNAP benefits are available for qualified Massachusetts residents.

**USDA Free and Reduced Lunch Program:** In August, Free and Reduced Lunch Applications will be mailed to all registered student households. In order to receive Free or Reduced Lunch meals, a Free and Reduced Lunch Application must be completed and returned to the Food Service Office. Parents should familiarize themselves with the School Committee Meal Charge Policy. <https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/Page/156>

### **Important Information about Free and Reduced Lunch Status:**

1. The published meal price is charged based on the status of the student on the date the meal is purchased. Please be aware that families who may qualify will have to pay full price until their application is approved. The effective date of the approved application establishes the status of the student. There is no retroactive credit applied to the account to remove any balance due unless it is directly tied to the approval date of the application. Please work with our Food Service staff if you would like more information about being able to put funds on account for your child.
2. Free lunch status students will not be allowed to have a negative account balance. Free lunch status allows a child to receive a free meal everyday. A la Carte items are not part of the USDA program. Cash or a Credit Balance with Food Service must be used to pay for A la Carte items.
3. Reduced lunch status students will be allowed to have a negative account balance up to a maximum dollar equivalent of six (6) reduced priced meals, which will be known as the "account cap." Reduced lunch status allows a child to receive reduced priced meals at \$0.40. Cash or a Credit Balance with Food Service must be used to pay for A la Carte items. Please work with our Food Service staff if you would like more information about being able to put funds on account for your child.
4. Bag Lunches can be made available for students who are attending field trips when requested. Sometimes, teachers make arrangements for bag lunches for the entire classroom. At other times, the parent will need to contact Food Service to make arrangements two weeks ahead of time. The field trip information packet from the school should indicate if lunches are being provided or not.
5. Students will soon be required to use PIN numbers that are assigned by the Food Service Program to make payment for meals.
6. The Food Services Department can be reached at (617) 730-2415 or (617) 730-2499.