One in eight New York City residents were unable to afford regular meals due to the food insecurity that they faced from 2015-2017, according to a study by The Hunger Free America.

That figure includes high-school and college-age students, who experts say can sometimes fly under the radar due to their fast-paced schedules and ability to purchase fast, cheap and processed food, lacking the nutrition they need to succeed in school.

The issue is being addressed at secondary education institutions on Staten Island, such as Wagner College, which offers a college readiness program that in part addresses food insecurity.

According to the website for St. John’s University, which has a campus on Staten Island, “a student’s ability to consistently obtain nutritious food is a critical factor in potentially seri- ous health issues.”

The site offers students experiencing food insecurity resources to address it, including links to local food pantries and information about financial aid.

“From my experience, problems with housing creates many problems with meals,” said Solvima Ramos, a nutritionist at Community Health Center of Rich- mond (CHCR). “For the average person, the cost for adequate housing takes up a large percentage of their income leaving a small amount of financial resources for high-quality food.”

STUDENTS SUPPORTING PARENTS MOST IMPACTED

Students impacted the most tend to be those supporting parents or siblings at home, those living independently for the first time with limited funds and lack of knowledge on how to prepare proper meals, and those supporting children at home, experts say.

“The student landscape appears to be changing, with more students entering or returning to school at older ages and/or with young, dependent children,” said Lau- ren Dineur, associate professor of Nutrition and Food Studies at Montclair State Univer- sity.

And despite a student having a job out- side of class, many were unable to afford a balance diet, and the student might not qualify for government assistance. “Rising costs for tuition, housing, healthcare, and other basic needs, coupled with lower wage sales rates, means that students have less money to spend on food,” said Dineur. Overall, hunger occurs throughout the city and state over a six-year period leading up to the study by Hunger Free America, but remained higher than before the recession.

“Experts say students’ food stability begins with their family at home, before entering college. At CCHCR, Ramos works with families regularly who either are hungry, or settling for food without any nutrients on a regu- lar basis.

When working with immigrants, she said their stories are no different than any families first arriving in New York City, sharing a home “to make ends meet.”

“I recommended these food pantries,” said Ramos. “They’re not full of canned foods anymore, and there’s still fresh fruit.”

With at least 12 food pantries and soup kitchens across the borough, the Staten Island Hunger Task Force was established to advocate for their efforts and for non- profit emergency feeding programs.

Fresh produce and food demonstrations also are offered on Staten Island at no cost by City Harvest, the city’s largest food rescue organization.

According to the group’s website, 6.4 mil- lion pounds of food will be rescued this year and delivered from farms and for hun- dreds of food pantries, soup kitchens and other community partners.