

**MEMO**

**TO:** Chief Administrators and Primary Contacts for Schools that Participate in the National School Lunch Program

**FROM:** Vonda Ramp, M.S., R.D.  
State Director, Child Nutrition Programs

**DATE:** January 19, 2021

**SUBJECT:** 2020-2021 School Year Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer

**MESSAGE:**

As part of the federal government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, funding for of Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) has been extended through the end of September 2021. Through P-EBT, eligible school children receive temporary emergency nutrition benefits loaded on EBT cards to purchase food outside of school.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) are currently developing a process for distributing the P-EBT benefits during the 2020-2021 school year. The goal is to begin issuing the P-EBT benefits no later than early spring. PDE will share additional details as soon as they become available.

Local education agencies (LEAs)/schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) will play a crucial role in ensuring benefits are dispensed appropriately to students in need. As such, LEAs can take the following steps to prepare for assisting with this latest round of P-EBT benefits.

**All LEAs that normally participate in NSLP can:**

- Ensure the correct mailing addresses for all students (via their primary parent or guardian) are up to date and as accurate as possible. Incorrect addresses complicated the issuance of P-EBT benefits during the first-round last year and may delay benefits being sent to families in a timely manner.

**LEAs that normally participate in NSLP and do not participate in Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) can:**

- Direct certification should have been completed, at least once, by January 8, 2021, per the Division of Food and Nutrition's December 15, 2020, Broadcast Email. If not already completed, process direct certifications immediately and continue to routinely conduct updates through the end of the 2020-21 school year. Note: CEP schools have until March 31, 2021, to process direct certification.

- Encourage households to submit an application for free or reduced-price school meals and process those applications in a timely manner.

P-EBT eligibility is based on whether students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Many school districts have been providing school meals through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and may not have collected meal applications at the start of the school year since these programs allow for all children and students in the community to access free meals. Please assure families that applying for free or reduced-price school meals does not change current access to those SSO or SFSP meals.

To reduce confusion, PDE advises LEAs to focus on soliciting applications from families in the school that are not directly certified or have not already been approved for free or reduced-price school meals this school year. An example of the messaging to families could be as follows:

*COVID-19 relief packages recently passed by the United States Congress contain numerous benefits for families financially impacted by the pandemic. Some of these benefits are available to students who are eligible for free or reduced-priced school meals.*

*If you believe your school-aged child(ren) may qualify for free or reduced-price meals this school year and have not yet submitted the application for free or reduced-price meals to the school, we encourage you to do so as soon as possible. [Insert school specific information regarding how to apply.]*

*The application then will be used to determine which benefits your child(ren) and/or household may be eligible to receive. Please be aware that applying for free or reduced-price meals will not impact meals that your child(ren) currently receives through the school.*

- Additional data will be needed from LEAs/schools that normally participate in NSLP to determine the level of PEBT benefit students will be eligible to receive. DHS and PDE are assessing the types of data and mechanisms to collect the data and will provide additional information as soon as it becomes available.

Thank you for continued support and assistance during these unprecedented times. PDE and DHS remain committed to ensuring that all families have access to as much financial assistance as possible.