

MEMO

TO: Chief Administrators and School Nutrition Programs Contact

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

DATE: April 28, 2020

SUBJECT: Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer for Free and Reduced Eligible Students

MESSAGE:

The federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 provides benefits, referred to as Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT), to families of school-aged children who would have otherwise received free or reduced-priced meals if it were not for school closures.

Families of school-aged children certified as free or reduced eligible will receive the equivalent of the free high rate for lunch and the severe need rate for breakfast for each day school was closed. That means a family will receive the benefit amount of \$5.70 for each school-aged child in their family for each day school has been closed since March 16, 2020. This benefit is extended to all children in Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) schools. This benefit will be issued in the form of an EBT card by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS). It is important to note this benefit is not in lieu of meals that schools and communities are currently providing; P-EBT is in addition to those meals.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is closely coordinating with DHS to develop a plan to be submitted to USDA for approval. PDE will be responsible for providing DHS a list of all school-aged students that are certified as eligible for free and reduced-priced meals. We know that Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are working in unusual circumstances and resources are stretched. PDE will be extracting as much information as possible from its direct certification system, PrimeroEdge, to alleviate/minimize the data requests. However, some LEAs only use PrimeroEdge for Direct Certification, which limits the information available to only those students that are Directly Certified. In the coming weeks, PDE will communicate directly with LEAs that only use PrimeroEdge for Direct Certification to obtain a file of free and reduced eligible students who are not directly certified. Details about the file process will be provided in the future email communications; however, in order to provide eligible families the P-EBT benefits due to them, LEAs will be required to participate in the data collection.

For LEA's that use the Pennsylvania Full Student Eligibility System, PDE expects to have sufficient information to provide to DHS if all fields in the LEAs student upload file are complete. PDE will extract the information from PrimeroEdge and only contact the LEA if more information is necessary.



As nutrition program sponsors already know from serving on the front lines, the economics of families/households have changed significantly since March. Families not previously eligible for free or reduced-priced meals may now be eligible. Families are applying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits that were not previously eligible. As we monitor the Direct Certification files, the number of directly certified students is increasing.

To ensure families in need receive the P-EBT benefit they are eligible for, we are asking LEAs to:

- Remind families that it is important that their contact information, most importantly name, address, and phone number, is up to date in the LEA's student information system if the LEA can accept and update changes at this time. This reminder can be generic using remote calling systems, text messages, and/or email.
- Review Direct Certification files in PrimeroEdge, and ensure that all potential high, medium, and sibling matches are reviewed and processed appropriately on a regular basis. A weekly review is ideal, but PDE understands this may not be practical for some LEAs at this time.
- Notify families, to the extent practical, about the ability to apply for free and reduced-priced meals and process applications as they are submitted. PDE understands this step is much easier for LEAs that use the Pennsylvania Full Student Eligibility System than for LEAs that use a paper application process, which would require mailing applications. However, all LEAs have access to COMPASS and can promote this as an option for families to use to complete an application for free or reduced-price school meals.

PDE recognizes that many LEAs are already maximizing their resources to ensure children are provided meals while school is closed. Families benefit from everyone's past, present and continued efforts. However, since free and reduced eligibility are determining factors/criteria for many programs (i.e., CEP, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, etc.) and grants (food service equipment grants, breakfast grants, etc.), LEAs may also benefit from capturing free and reduced eligibility as it increases.

Thank you for your time and relentless dedication to serve the children of Pennsylvania during these unprecedented times.