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SUN Bucks (Summer EBT)

Includes background, eligibility criteria, best practices, frequently asked questions (FAQ), resources, and contact information regarding SUN Bucks (Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer [EBT]).

Overview

On December 29, 2023, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced the [Interim Final Rule: Establishing the Summer EBT Program and Rural Non-Congregate Option in the Summer Meal Programs](#)  which codified the permanent SUN Bucks program into regulations. SUN Bucks helps families with eligible school-age children buy groceries during the summer months when kids might not have full access to school meals. In California, SUN Bucks is administered through a partnership between the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and the California Department of Education (CDE). The CDSS is the lead agency implementing the program, in partnership with the CDE. Local educational agencies (LEA) play a critical role in the SUN Bucks eligibility determination process for students.

Access to the [Universal Benefits Application \(UBA\)](#) (DOCX) template:

[Available Translations of the Universal Benefits Application](#)

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Application

The eligibility period for summer 2026 began on July 1, 2025, and goes through August 31, 2026.

Students who are directly certified (CalFresh, CalWORKs, or Medi-Cal at or under 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level) or categorically eligible (homeless, foster, or migrant) for free or reduced-price meals (FRPM) are automatically eligible for SUN Bucks and **do not** need to submit a Universal Benefits Application or National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal application.

Students who attend Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and Provision 2 (P2) sites in non-base years and are eligible for FRPM based only on household income will need to submit a Universal Benefits Application (UBA) to have their SUN Bucks eligibility determined. Students at Standard Counting and Claiming sites who are eligible for FRPM based only on household income submit NSLP meal applications yearly. NSLP meal applications meet SUN Bucks application standards.

The CDE developed a UBA template for LEAs to use at NSLP schools operating under federal provisions such as CEP or 2 P2 in non-base years. The UBA must be collected annually to establish SUN Bucks eligibility for students who are not directly certified or categorically eligible for FRPM. Schools operating standard counting and claiming must continue using NSLP meal applications to make free and reduced-price meal (FRPM) eligibility determinations. The UBA is only intended for schools operating a federal provision.


LEAs that collect UBAs must ensure households are submitting applications directly to the LEA. The CDE is unable to accept or process UBAs on behalf of LEAs. Any UBA submitted to the CDE will be returned to the LEA and may result in a delay of benefit issuance for eligible participants.

The table below indicates which application LEAs should use based on whether they participate in NSLP/School Breakfast Program (SBP) and/or operate a federal provision.

School Meal Program Participation Model	Application Requirement
Standard Counting and Claiming	Only NSLP Applications – Collect yearly for FRPM/SUN Bucks eligibility and Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) purposes
Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)	Universal Benefits Applications – Collect yearly for FRPM/SUN Bucks eligibility; may also be used for LCFF purposes
Provision 2 (P2)	<p>NSLP Applications – Collect during LEAs P2 base year for FRPM/SUN Bucks eligibility; may also be used for LCFF purposes</p> <p>Universal Benefits Applications – Collect during non-base years for FRPM/SUN Bucks eligibility; may also be used for LCFF purposes</p>

Access to the [Universal Benefits Application \(UBA\) template](#) (DOCX):

[Available Translations of the Universal Benefits Application](#)

Please note, the template UBA complies with federal requirements for the SUN Bucks program. To ensure access to SUN Bucks benefits for children, eligibility determinations must be made using this application. Eligibility determinations made using the UBA can be used for SUN Bucks, Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) unduplicated pupil counts, and, if applicable, other benefits specific to your LEA or community (i.e., discounts on internet services, transportation services, etc.). If an LEA does not use the UBA template and instead creates their own SUN Bucks-compliant application it **must comply** with the federal requirements set forth in [Title 7, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 292.13](#) .

Universal Benefits Application (UBA) Collection

CEP schools and P2 schools (in non-base years) will need to collect a UBA for those students who are **only FRPM eligible through household income**. Students in the following categories are automatically eligible for SUN Bucks and a UBA is not required:

- Have been directly certified at any time during the eligibility period; or
- Have a migrant or homeless program record in California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS) that is or was open at any time during the eligibility period (note that the program record does not have to overlap with the current school of enrollment); or
- Have been identified as foster in CALPADS at any time during the eligibility period.

LEAs may want to focus UBA collection efforts on students who are only eligible for FRPM based on income.

LEAs can incorporate the UBA in their designated online portals or make hard copy applications available. LEAs should encourage parents and guardians to complete the UBA to ensure their children can access all eligible benefits.

LEAs that collect UBAs must accept them at any point in the year, and process them within 15 days of receipt.

For questions or additional information on the SUN Bucks program contact SummerEBT@cde.ca.gov. For questions regarding LCFF, contact PASE@cde.ca.gov.

For outreach materials that can be used to promote SUN Bucks, visit the [CDSS Partners web page](#) .

Questions: Nutrition Services Division | 800-952-5609

Last Reviewed: Tuesday, May 19, 2026