



Food and Nutrition
Service

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April 19, 2022

SUBJECT: Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Program (P-EBT)
Approval of Pennsylvania's State Plan for School Children,
School Year 2021-2022

TO: Dr. Patty Bennett
Regional Administrator
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127; the Act), as amended, authorized a temporary assistance program for households with children without access to meals in school and to certain SNAP-enrolled children in child care during the public health emergency declared on January 27, 2020. Pursuant to the authority granted under Section 1101 of the Act, FNS approves Pennsylvania's enclosed plan to operate P-EBT for school children.

Summary of State's Plan

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and the Pennsylvania Department of Education will issue P-EBT benefits through the State's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) EBT card system to households with eligible children. The State's plan for school children covers the months of September 2021 through May 2022.

School children are eligible for benefits if they would have received free or reduced price meals at their schools through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) if not for the closure or reduced attendance or hours of their schools for a period of at least 5 consecutive days. The State will use the best feasibly available data and USDA-approved simplifying assumptions to issue benefits in amounts that are tied as closely as possible to the number of days that eligible children do not receive a meal service at school.

The State and its school districts will identify children eligible for free or reduced price NSLP meals using the most current available data. All school districts that rely on eligibility data from the most recent prior year will have a means to address that they do not issue benefits to school year 2020-2021 graduates and other non-students, and will offer households with new students the ability to establish their eligibility through the traditional school food authority-run school meal application and direct certification processes.

In addition, Pennsylvania has or will:

- rely on new free or reduced price school meal eligibility determinations in schools that collected new applications this year, otherwise use schools' most recent free or reduced price lists:

- newly free or reduced-price certified students will be eligible for P-EBT benefits starting from the beginning of the school year or their date of enrollment (if later than the start of the school year),
- collect information from public and private schools and school districts twice during the year, in early May and late June:
 - the state will be assisted in this process by one of the state's regional education service agencies,
 - the state will collect information through a modified spreadsheet developed by the state for P-EBT in school year 2019-2020,
 - schools or districts will report individual students' free or reduced price status and their number of P-EBT eligible days:
 - schools and school districts that are tracking COVID-related absences or virtual learning days will provide the actual count of those days for each month,
 - schools that are not tracking COVID-related absences will report blocks of excused absences of 5 or more consecutive days:
 - for households of children attending schools using the 5 consecutive day threshold as a proxy for a COVID-related absences, the household may make a claim with the state through its Web Emergency Operations Center or P-EBT hotline for any COVID-related absence that is less than 5 consecutive days:
 - the child's parent or guardian will attest that the absence days are COVID-related and the state will retain a record of the parent or guardian's attestation,
 - the state will verify with the school that the absences were excused before the state issues benefits for those days, and
 - the state will take steps to prevent the issuance of benefits to more than one claimant through this process for the same child's P-EBT-eligible days,
- set the monthly benefit for fully virtual students to a fixed 20 days, which is 180 school instructional days divided by the 9 benefit months in the state's plan,
- calculate benefits for each eligible student based on the student's actual number of P-EBT eligible days each month (as determined above),
- provide guidance to schools detailing the requirements for:
 - determining school eligibility based on school closures or reductions in attendance and hours,
 - determining what is a P-EBT-eligible COVID-related absence and,
 - determining the number of benefit days for individual students,
- tentatively issue benefits for the months of September through November over a 10 business day period in mid to late May,

- tentatively issue benefits for the months of December through February over a 10 business day period in mid to late June,
- tentatively issue benefits for the months of March through May (or April if the public health emergency ends in April) over a 10 business day period in mid to late July.

Finally, the State will identify risks for improper payments and ensure a high level of integrity.

Estimated Caseload and Value of P-EBT Benefits

The State will calculate monthly benefits for each eligible child in the household equal to the daily reimbursement for a free breakfast, lunch, and snack multiplied by the number of benefit days calculated as described in the State's plan.

- Pennsylvania estimates that it will issue \$518.2 million to approximately 816,000 children for school closures and reductions in attendance and hours extending from September 2021 through May 2022.

Release of Information

Pursuant to Section 1101(e) of the Act, the Secretary hereby authorizes the release of the information necessary to carry out P-EBT in Pennsylvania. Section 1101(e) of the Act states, "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of Agriculture may authorize State educational agencies and school food authorities administering a school lunch program under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1751 et seq.) to release to appropriate officials administering the supplemental nutrition assistance program such information as may be necessary to carry out this section."

Plan Timetable and Revisions

Pennsylvania will distribute benefits to households consistent with the timeframes identified in the State plan. Should the State encounter challenges or delays that significantly impair its ability to implement the approved P-EBT plan or require substantive changes, the State must notify the FNS Regional Office as soon as possible. The FNS Regional Office will work with the State to identify reasonable solutions and review revised plans for approval or further revision.

Civil Rights

Pennsylvania will continue to comply with civil rights requirements, to include providing equal access to individuals with disabilities and individuals who are limited English proficient.

Administrative Funds

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services will participate in a P-EBT Administrative Budget Planning process using the FNS-366(a) Program and Budget Summary. When the FNS-366(a) is finalized, that will determine the State's

Administrative Grant level. However, the FNS-366(a), Program and Budget Summary, may be updated and revised as the State's operational plan evolves.

Reporting

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services will complete the FNS-292B, the FNS-46, the FNS-388, and the FNS-778 reports in accordance with existing requirements.

FNS appreciates Pennsylvania's exceptional efforts to maintain children's access to nutritious meals, and understands that even as the nation recovers from this difficult time, State agencies and local program operators will still face any number of challenges. FNS stands ready to provide additional support as needed. If you have questions, please contact the FNS Mid-Atlantic Regional Office.

Sincerely,

Cindy Long
Administrator