



How Schools Can Support Participation in Summer EBT

When the school year ends, millions of children from households with low incomes lose access to the school meals they rely on. The [Summer Nutrition Programs](#) were designed to replace school meals during summer vacation, but they reach only a fraction of the children who need them. The Summer EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) Program, also known as SUN Bucks, offers families \$120 per eligible child per summer period to help cover food expenses to bridge that gap. [Summer Nutrition Programs combined with Summer EBT](#) is an effective way to meet children's nutritional needs all summer long.

Summer EBT is a vital program to ensure that more children from households with low incomes have access to adequate nutrition during the summer months. Schools and school nutrition staff play a critical part in ensuring the success of this program, as they hold the required data that connects eligible families to receiving benefits automatically, and also have direct access to eligible families. By leveraging their role and resources, schools can help the state agency ensure that Summer EBT reaches all eligible families and keep children fed until they return to school in the fall.

Connecting Children to Summer EBT

Children can be connected to Summer EBT through three different streams:

1. enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or in some states, Medicaid
2. National School Lunch Program (NSLP) enrollment, either through direct certification or through an application
3. a family submitting a Summer EBT application

If a child is enrolled in an NSLP school and is income-qualified for school meals but is not issued benefits automatically through either of the first two streams, the family will need to fill out an application. In Community Eligibility Program (CEP) districts, the application will most often need to be completed by families that are not directly certified.

A School's Role in Summer EBT

Schools participate in the Summer EBT Program in two important ways:

- **Data Collection and Upload**

For the state agency to be able to issue benefits to eligible children, schools are asked to provide data on those students that are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.

While each state has a different system for aggregating National School Lunch Program data for Summer EBT, they typically ask schools to upload student data through an online portal by a certain date.

- **Accept and Process Summer EBT Applications**

Students must [apply for Summer EBT benefits](#) if they attend an NSLP-participating school and meet the income requirements for free or reduced-price meals but have not yet been individually approved through an NSLP application or direct certification. While state agencies can request that schools take on the burden of processing the Summer EBT application created by the state, those agencies must reimburse schools for the time spent processing and verifying applications.

Promising Practices: Schools and Summer EBT

In developing the regulations for Summer EBT, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) aimed to minimize the administrative burden for schools. However, leadership and engagement by schools can play a key role in the success of Summer EBT.

The following are strategies that schools can use to help maximize participation in and awareness of Summer EBT:

1. **Act as a point of contact for families:** Schools are often seen as a trusted messenger within the community. Families are more likely to contact their school instead of their state agency when questions arise about Summer EBT. Schools can be prepared to answer more general questions around Summer EBT and help direct families to more information as needed.
2. **Inform key staff about the Summer EBT Program:** A wide range of staff within a school district interact with eligible families and can help to provide information on Summer EBT. Schools often have social workers, counselors, and staff who work with families. Providing staff with information about Summer EBT eligibility and important dates related to the program can help families connect with the program.
3. **Collect and process school meal applications continuously:** The simplest way for a family to receive Summer EBT is through free or reduced-price meal eligibility. Even if schools are offering free meals to all of their students, it is important to maximize school meal application returns. See FRAC's [Strategies to Increase School Meal Application Returns](#) for more information, including sample resources that make the connection between the school meal application and Summer EBT.

4. **Encourage families to apply for Summer EBT in Community Eligibility Provision districts:** Many schools across the country participate in CEP, which allows high-poverty schools to offer meals to all students at no charge. However, not all the children enrolled in these schools are automatically eligible for Summer EBT. These schools should inform families with children who are not directly certified about Summer EBT, the income qualifications, and information on applying.
5. **Employ district-wide automated calls and texts to keep families updated on program operations:** While families within school districts may receive their benefits at different times, schools can help ensure families are utilizing their benefits. Schools can send out automated messages throughout the summer reminding families to apply for the Summer EBT Program and to use their benefits at the store before they expire. These texts can include a phone number to call at the state level if a family has not received their benefit or has questions about Summer EBT.
6. **Utilize relationships with families to promote additional nutrition program participation:** In addition to school meals, many schools also operate other nutrition programs, including summer and afterschool meals. Students who participate in these programs often need additional nutrition supports. By promoting Summer EBT during these other programs or promoting summer meals or afterschool meals during Summer EBT or NSLP application outreach, schools can help ensure children have access to proper nutrition year-round.

Program Outreach Examples

Hosting a webpage dedicated to Summer EBT can be an easy way for schools to keep families informed about Summer EBT. The examples below include elements that should be considered.

- **City of Burlington Public Schools**: This webpage informs families about Summer EBT and includes frequently asked questions, contact information, and the different ways to apply. It also includes links to outreach materials in two languages.
- **Virginia Beach City Public Schools**: This district website includes a list of schools within the district that operate CEP. If parents are aware their student is enrolled in a CEP school, they may be more likely to fill out a Summer EBT application if they believe they are income eligible.

Additionally, including information about the program in a newsletter that is sent to parents can help spread the word.

- **Alexandria City Public Schools:** This announcement, which was circulated in a newsletter to parents, included information about SUN Bucks, who qualifies for the program and automatically receives benefits, and who is eligible but needs to complete an application. It also links to the state's website for more information.

When it comes to targeted outreach for families, much of the work is behind the scenes.

- **Syracuse City School District:** Before Summer EBT became a permanent program, the district used grant funding to build a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program referral system. This system helped identify children who were not directly certified for benefits but were likely income-eligible. It allowed the district to connect these families to SNAP, identify those who may need to apply for Summer EBT, and send reminders encouraging them to submit- their applications.

Additional Resources

- Outreach materials:
 - [USDA SUN Bucks](#)
 - Many states and Washington, D.C., have created sample social media materials, including [North Carolina](#), the [District of Columbia](#), and [Ohio](#).
- FRAC's sample Summer EBT communications for school districts:
 - *Letter to Parents or Guardians re: Summer EBT*

Dear Parent or Guardian,

This summer, **[STATE]** will be operating the Summer EBT Program. You may be eligible to receive benefits this summer if you are income-eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Eligible students and families will receive money on a new or existing EBT card to help purchase groceries. The benefit will amount to \$120 per eligible child for the summer. You can still receive meals from summer meal sites in addition to Summer EBT benefits.

[Insert language re: distribution process, who needs to complete an application, where to go to fill it out.]

To learn more, please see these **[Insert link to state resource page]**.

Sincerely,

- Sample robocall and text scripts:

- *Robocall Script #1*

Hello. You may be eligible to receive Summer EBT to help feed your child during the summer break. Each eligible child will receive \$120 on a new or existing EBT card. You can use a Summer EBT card to purchase food at stores that accept EBT.

Please call/visit **[Insert phone number/Website]** to see if you may be eligible and determine whether you need to complete an application.

Students can still visit summer meal sites if they are receiving Summer EBT benefits. For more information on the Summer EBT Program and food assistance, please visit **[Insert state website]** or call **[Insert assistance line]**.

- *Text Message Script*

Hello **[Parent's first name]**, this is **[Name]** from **[School district]**.

You may be eligible to receive Summer EBT to help buy groceries during the summer months. For more information on this benefit, call **[Insert phone number]**, text **[Phone number, if this is an option]**, or visit **[Link]**.

Summer EBT and school meals are not considered “public charge” benefits and do not affect immigration status. Students can still visit summer meal sites if they are receiving Summer EBT benefits.

- Sample social media messages:

- *X (formerly known as Twitter)*

1. #SummerEBT funds are coming for summer 2026. Eligible families will receive \$120 per eligible child for the summer. Learn more here **[Insert webpage]**.
2. #SummerEBT funds are coming summer 2026. Automatically eligible families will get a Summer EBT card in **[Insert timeline]** check your existing EBT card for funds **[Insert website]**.

3. #SummerEBT can help you feed your family while schools are closed for summer break. You will receive a card that you can use to purchase groceries. Learn more here: **[Link to state resource page]**.
- *Facebook/Instagram*
1. Summer EBT can help you feed your family while schools are closed for summer break. Learn more here: **[Link to state resource page]**.
 2. Summer EBT can help you feed your family while schools are closed in the summer and fill the gaps left by missing school meals. Learn more here: **[Link to state resource page or <https://www.summerebt.org/>]**.
- Sample webpage text:

Receive \$120 per Eligible Child With the Summer EBT Program

Summer EBT is a federal nutrition program that helps eligible families buy food for their school-age children during the summer. Families will receive \$120 for each eligible child to buy groceries during the summer. Children who receive Summer EBT benefits can still participate in other summer meal programs. Receiving benefits will not affect children's or families' immigration status.

Is My Child Eligible for Summer EBT?

Your child is automatically eligible for Summer EBT benefits if:

- Your household already receives SNAP, TANF, **[List other programs that qualify a child in your state]**.
- Your child attends a school that participates in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program, and your child is income-qualified for either free or reduced-price school meals.

If your child attends one of the following schools **[List CEP schools in the district]**, you may need to apply for Summer EBT if you are not enrolled in SNAP, TANF, FDPIR, the foster care program, or Medicaid **[REMOVE IF THIS DOES NOT APPLY IN YOUR STATE]**. You can check whether you qualify for benefits [here](#).

[Insert information from your state agency on how to apply.]

FAQ

- How will I receive the benefit?
 - o **[Enter state-specific information.]** Possible answer: If you have an existing EBT card that you use for SNAP benefits, your Summer EBT benefits will be automatically added to that card. If you do not already have an EBT card, you will receive one in the mail.
- When will I receive the benefits?
 - o **[Enter state-specific information.]**
- Can I update my address?
 - o Please reach out to your child's school to update your current address.

For more information, please contact **[Enter state and school contact information]**.