

Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT)

Kentucky Youth Advocates Virtual Forum

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What is P-EBT?

- P-EBT is designed to provide a reimbursement equivalent to the value of free and reduced-price meals that students would have received in the school setting if not for the measures put in place to control the spread of COVID-19 (school closures).
- P-EBT was made available to states through the bipartisan Families First Coronavirus Response Act (PL 116-127) passed by Congress on 3/18/2020; the reimbursement is 100% federally funded.
- P-EBT is a very different type of benefit than the better-known Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

Eligibility for Free/Reduced-Price Meals

To be eligible, students are either:

- Certified through an eligibility process (forms);
- Automatically certified because they receive assistance through a public assistance program such as Medicaid, SNAP, or cash assistance (also called direct certification); or
- Attending a school that has a high percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price meals, allowing ALL students (regardless of income) to receive free or reduced-price meals through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) under federal law.

Eligibility for P-EBT

- All students eligible for free/reduced-price meals, including all students attending CEP schools; and
- Unable to attend schools due to efforts to control the spread of COVID-19

Spring 2020 (first phase)

- For March, April, and May, all schools were closed, so all students eligible for free and reduced-price meals were eligible for P-EBT.
- DCBS, working closely with the Kentucky Dept. of Education, was able to:
 - Provide P-EBT to all students who were current SNAP, MA, and/or TANF beneficiaries directly to existing SNAP/TANF EBT cards or, for MA-only children, by new P-EBT cards mailed to the case address.
 - Establish an application process for all other non-SNAP students who were eligible for P-EBT.
- All students eligible for the same amount; \$313.50 for all three months
- Served over 540,000 students, representing about \$169M.

Fall 2020 (second phase)

- Guidance for issuing P-EBT for August and September was provided to states on August 20th, and included a mandate that all benefits be issued prior to the end of FFY 20 (September 30), which ended the authority of the FFRCA.
- Additionally, eligibility was complicated by the different methods of instruction from district to district and sometimes even school to school, including in-person, completely virtual, and hybrid.
- Having such a short window in which to gather this data was a challenge, particularly with ever-changing school schedules and instruction methods as the virus moved across the state.

Fall 2020 (cont'd)

- DCBS again worked in close partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education, school districts, private schools, schools on military bases, and individual public schools to gather as much data as we could given our time constraints.
- With such a short deadline, implementing an application process just was not practical.
- In the midst of a 100-year pandemic, DCBS erred on the side of providing P-EBT to all potentially-eligible children using the best data available at the time

Fall 2020 (cont'd)

- Accordingly, we placed language in the header of the card carrier that states “If you do not want to accept P-EBT benefits or if you received this card by mistake, please destroy the P-EBT card.”
- Amount per student varied based on school and/or student schedules
- Issued benefits to 640K students for a total of \$119M

Fall 2020 (cont'd)

- We later (December) learned that some schools were inadvertently omitted from the dataset for August and September P-EBT.
- We identified those schools and issued P-EBT cards to those students in a short period of time.

P-EBT for October and Beyond

- P-EBT was re-authorized from October 2020 through September 2021 (if needed) by the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act (PL 116-159), signed on October 1, 2020.
- Eligibility is similar to past rounds, except that states can use “simplifying assumptions” to average and standardize benefit amounts.
- Plan submitted on 1/20/2021; approved 2/25/2021.
- P-EBT began flowing 3/13/2021

October and Beyond

- Daily rate = \$6.82
- Simplified monthly amounts:
 - All-virtual students are eligible for 20 days of P-EBT per month, or \$136.40
 - Students on a hybrid schedule receive 12 days per month, or \$81.84
- Determined on the school district level, surveying each district on their predominant instruction method for the time period.
- Number of days per month determined by number of instructional days in the school year (Oct-May) divided by 8 months. For all-virtual students, this was 20 per month. For hybrid, 20 days multiplied by 3/5 (assumes average of 3 virtual and 2 in-person days/week).

October and Beyond (cont'd)

- Reconsideration is possible. If a student maintained an all-virtual schedule while the school was hybrid or even 100% in-person, they can call us starting the week of April 5 to request reconsideration. The caller will need the student's 10-digit SSID, full name, and DOB. The caller will also have to provide the school contact information to verify the student's schedule.
- For SNAP recipients, benefits placed on SNAP EBT card
- For all others, benefits placed on previously-issued P-EBT cards from the Aug/Sept round
- First timers (young children, recent transplants) will be issued a new card (about 15,000 cards, mailing 3/25)

October and Beyond Issuance

- October: issued March 15 for 515,902 students; \$54.9M
- November: available week of March 22 for 556,481 students; \$69M
- December: available week of March 29 for 567,661 students; \$74.9M
- January: available week of April 5 for 535,435 students; \$61.7M
- February: available week of April 12 for 530,446 students; \$59M

Total October-February: \$319.6M

- Future months will be a new file each month, and will be issued on the 25th of the month until complete.

October and Beyond: Other Issues

- If child in a non-CEP school is eligible for NSLP but has not completed eligibility with the school, they can still do that. Once eligibility is established, the file from KDE should pick that child up, and eligibility will go back to October.
- Staffing: maintaining the same number of DCBS staff on the dedicated team on the DCBS phone number. Also added 30+ call agents through call services contract provider to handle highest-volume issues.
- Stakeholder meetings with advocates, FRYSCs, School Nutrition Directors, DPPs, immigrant-serving organizations, and others to help provide a consistent message.

More about P-EBT

- P-EBT can only serve students served by the National School Lunch Program, which includes almost all public schools, Kentucky's military base schools, and some private schools.
- Traditionally homeschooled students are not eligible under federal rules.
- P-EBT can be used to purchase the same types of foods as SNAP.
- Again, P-EBT is 100% federally funded; they do not flow through the state or to any individual, but are paid to grocers, farmers' markets, and other USDA-approved businesses only when the card is used to purchase eligible food items.
- If a family believes they are not eligible for P-EBT and destroys the card, funds remain with the federal government.

Questions?

DCBS Call Services: 855-306-8959

P-EBT FAQ: <https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dcbs/Documents/pebtfaq.pdf>

Spanish: <https://chfs.ky.gov/agencies/dcbs/Documents/pebtfaqsp.pdf>