

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) 2020-21 School Year Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

What is P-EBT?

The federal Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 provided temporary benefits, referred to as P-EBT, to families of school-aged children who would have received free or reduced-priced meals through the USDA National School Lunch Program (NSLP) if school had not been affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. These benefits were issued in late Spring/Summer of 2020.

A second issuance of P-EBT was authorized by Congress for the 2020-2021 school year. This second issuance will provide the equivalent monetary amount for school breakfast, lunch, and snack to families of students who are enrolled in schools participating in the NSLP but are not attending in person due to COVID-19. For the issuance this school year, Pennsylvania will distribute benefits to about 928,000 children – for a total distribution of about \$1 billion.

Who is eligible to receive P-EBT benefits?

P-EBT benefits are only available to students who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals or attend a Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) school, enrolled in a school which participates in the NSLP, and for school days the eligible student was/is not receiving in-person instruction (school closures, virtual/remote instruction, absences, quarantine, etc.). The USDA has approved a simplifying assumption that allows Pennsylvania to issue a standard partial benefit amount across the state for students that were/are both in person and virtual (blended).

Who is not eligible to receive P-EBT benefits?

Children are not eligible to receive P-EBT benefits if they:

- attend in person on all school days;
- are home schooled;
- attend cyber charter school (this does not include virtual/remote learning under the operational control of a school board);
- attend a school in another state (i.e., NY, NJ, MD, OH); or
- attend a school that does not participate in NSLP.

When will P-EBT benefits be issued to families?

Benefits will be issued in three separate stages:

- Benefits for September – November 2020: Issued late Spring 2021
- Benefits for December 2020 – February 2021: Issued in second and third week of June 2021
- Benefits for March – May 2021: Issued in third and fourth week of July 2021

Children whose families already receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits will receive the P-EBT benefits on the household's regular EBT card, if possible. Otherwise, students will receive a new P-EBT card in the eligible student's name.

How much will each eligible student receive?

Each student will receive \$6.82 for each day they were not attending school in person. This will range from 0-180 school days. Benefits will be issued based on September 2020 – May 2021, using an average of 20 school days/month (9 months x 20 days = 180 days).

The USDA has approved a simplifying assumption that allows Pennsylvania to issue a partial standard benefit for all students in a blended learning model (in-person and virtual).

The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) will calculate the benefits each student will receive based on data the school provides.

Will schools be required to submit data in order for DHS to determine which students are eligible for P-EBT benefits?

Yes. Schools will be asked to submit data twice using a data collection template. The data collection periods are:

First Data Collection:

- For the months of September 2020 – February 2021
- Due no later than April 24, 2021

Second Data Collection:

- For the months of March 2021 – May 2021
- Due no later than July 2, 2021.

Students are only eligible for P-EBT benefits on days they were not receiving in-person instruction. How will this information be captured?

The level of in-person instruction a student received/s will be generalized into three categories for each respective month September 2020 – May 2021:

- In-person (100%)
- Virtual (100%)
- Blended (both in-person and virtual)

What does the in-person instruction category include?

Students should be marked “In-person” on the data template for each respective month if the student was in-person every (100%) school day of the respective month. This means the student was physically present every school day of the respective month.

The student had no absences or virtual/remote learning days or there were no school closures.

A school day is defined as a day of instruction that counts toward the 180-day school year calendar. School holidays and snow day closures (when staff were not required to work) do not count as school days.

Students in this category will receive **NO** benefits.

What does the virtual instruction category include?

Students should be marked “Virtual” on the data template for each respective month the student was not physically in-person for any school day of the month (regardless of the reason). The student attended virtual classes or were not in-person 100% of the month (every school day).

Students in this category will receive **full** benefits for the respective month. The calculation would be $\$6.82 \times 20 \text{ days} = \$136.40/\text{student}$.

What does the blended instruction category include?

Students should be marked “Blended” on the data template for each respective month the student received a combination of in-person and virtual/remote instruction during the month.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- The student was neither 100% in-person nor 100% virtual/remote (including absences) in the respective month.
- The student had some in-person days and some virtual/remote days.
- The student was scheduled to be in-person but had absences or could not attend school due to being quarantined, virtual/remote snow days, etc.

Students in this category will receive a standard **partial** benefit. For the months of September 2020 – February 2021 (first and second issuance stages), the benefit level will be 65%. As schools shift to more in-person instruction, this benefit level may change for March 2021 – May 2021 (third issuance stage). The calculation would be $\$6.82 \times 20 \text{ days} \times .65 = \$88.66/\text{student}$.

If a student only recently became eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, when does their P-EBT eligibility begin?

USDA is allowing a student who is determined eligible at any point in the school year to be considered eligible for P-EBT for the full school year, based on the student’s mode of instruction (Virtual, Blended, or In-Person). As a part of the data collection for P-EBT, schools only need to capture whether the child is eligible for free or reduced-price meals, not when the student’s NSLP eligibility began.

What is the Local Education Agency (LEA)/School Food Authority's (SFA) role in P-EBT?

The LEA/SFA must:

- Complete the data collection template accurately using only the format provided. The data dictionary provides details about each field.
- Submit the data by the required deadline. If a school does not submit the report on time, the students will not be considered eligible for P-EBT for that stage of benefits.
- Provide data for EVERY enrolled student (partial or full-time) on both the 1st and 2nd data collection. DHS will determine if the student is eligible for benefits and how much.
- Upload the data collection template to <https://pebt.center-school.org/>. The data transmission system will run preliminary checks for complete files and reject files that are not complete. As necessary, correct any errors and re-upload.

Are Residential Child Care Institutions (RCCI) required to submit the data collection template?

Yes. RCCI's that have an agreement with PDE to participate in the NSLP must complete and submit the data collection template. DHS will determine if students are eligible for P-EBT benefits based on the data provided.

My school is not currently serving meals through the NSLP. Are we required to submit the data collection template?

Yes. All schools that have an agreement with PDE to participate in the NSLP must complete and submit the data collection template even if they are not currently serving meals through NSLP because they have paused meal service, are serving meals through the Summer Food Service Program or Seamless Summer Option, or do not believe they have students eligible for P-EBT. DHS will determine if students are eligible to receive P-EBT based on the data submitted.

What organization is handling the data transmission and providing assistance to LEAs/SFAs?

The Center for Schools and Communities (CSC), Intermediate Unit (IU) 16, will serve as the point of contact for all school data collection efforts on behalf of DHS and PDE. The IU will collect and review data from schools; submit data to DHS; monitor the timely submission of data; research data inquiries that are submitted to DHS from families; reach out to schools, as needed, to answer data inquiries; and provide research findings to DHS.

LEAs/SFA's must contact the IU with questions or for technical assistance with completing the data collection template. PDE will not be able to assist. The IU telephone number is: 1-800-683-5100. The IU email address is: pebt@csc.csiu.org.

DO NOT provide the IU telephone number or email address to families/public. The IU will not be able to assist families.

Schools will upload the data collection template to <https://pebt.center-school.org/>. This is a secure site. Within two weeks LEAs/SFA's will receive an informational email from the IU with log-in instructions. This email will go the Chief Administrator and Primary Contact as listed in PEARS. The email will come from pebt@csc.csiu.org.

What is the role of DHS in P-EBT?

After receiving the data from the IU, DHS will remove any duplicate students, review students who are listed as "Paid" status and determine if they received P-EBT benefits in school year 2019-2020. If the student received P-EBT benefits last school year, they will also receive P-EBT benefits for current school year 2020-2021. DHS will do this cross match; schools do not need to do it. Additionally, DHS will calculate the P-EBT benefits based on data provided in the data template from the school, issue benefits, and maintain the Customer Service Call Center and website for the public. As a reminder, schools must contact the IU for assistance. This DHS Customer Service Call Center is for the public and they will not be able to assist schools with data collection questions.

How will the P-EBT cards be distributed?

Children whose families already receive SNAP or TANF benefits will receive P-EBT benefits on the household's regular EBT card, if possible. Parents can check card balances at www.connectebt.com or calling 1-888-328-7366.

P-EBT-eligible students who do not currently receive SNAP or TANF benefits will receive their benefits on a white card marked with "Pennsylvania" on the front. All students will receive a new card on their first issuance for the 2020-21 school year, even if they received a P-EBT card during the 2019-2020 P-EBT issuance. Each student will receive a card. For example: a family with 3 eligible students will receive 3 separate cards. Cards will be mailed in the student's name to the address provided for the primary parent/guardian. This mailing will be coming from Texas in a non-descript white envelope.

How will families know if they are receiving a card, or what they should do when they receive a card?

Each eligible student will be mailed a letter detailing P-EBT. This letter is a separate mailing from the card. The letter will be mailed in the student's name to the address provided for the primary parent/guardian. The letter will explain what the P-EBT card is, where and how to use the card, how to create a PIN for the card, what items are eligible for purchase with the card, and who to contact with questions.

What can schools do to facilitate the issuance of P-EBT to families?

Schools can facilitate the process by:

- Completing the data template accurately and timely for both 1st and 2nd submission. Data errors delay benefit issuance, create extra work for everyone involved, and increases frustration of families.
- Ensuring the **mailing** address on file in the school's SIS for the primary parent/guardian is current and accurate.
- Assisting families with completing the Household Application for Free or Reduced-Price Meals and process them timely. Households can apply by contacting their student's school of attendance or the COMPASS website: www.compass.state.pa.us. However, students that are not identified as eligible for free or reduced-price school meals for the 2020-2021 school year, but were eligible in 2019-2020, will also receive P-EBT benefits. **DHS will check for this; schools do not need to check for 2019-20 eligibility.**
- Responding to data inquiries from the IU promptly.
- Directing all parent/family/public inquiries to DHS Customer Service Line: 484-363-2137 or <https://forms.juvar.com/forms/eb604f74-e01c-463e-82ea-04c416a5c9c5>. It should be noted that benefits will not be issued any earlier than the middle of May 2021, therefore directing families to the DHS Customer Service Line prior to middle of May 2021 will be premature.
- Do not provide the IU phone number to parents/families or the public. The IU will not be able to assist them.
- Do not direct parents/families or the public to PDE. PDE will not be able to assist them.
- Do not direct parents/families or the public to the County Assistance Office (CAO). CAOs will not be able to assist them. CAOs will be instructed to refer parents/family/public inquiries to the DHS Customer Service Line, not to the school, IU, or PDE.
- Due to the number of variables, schools are otherwise limited with assisting parents beyond ensuring student is enrolled, address is correct, eligibility status of free or reduced, and whether the student was marked as in-person, virtual, or blended for respective months. Schools are advised to not try to calculate benefits for parents. Benefit levels will vary by student, even amongst siblings since benefit levels are determined by the number of days an eligible student is not receiving in-person instruction.

What resources are available for families to learn more about P-EBT?

- Families can be directed to DHS's website for an informational video for families and for additional information. The website is: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/coronavirus/Pages/P-EBT-Guide.aspx>.
- Additional resources can be found at Food Research and Action Center website: <https://frac.org/pebtfaq> and Just Harvest website: <https://www.justharvest.org/faq-about-pandemic-ebt-in-pennsylvania/>.

Where is the P-EBT information for schools located?

All P-EBT information for schools is located on PEARS Download Forms, P-EBT section.

Are students that are home schooled or attend cyber charter school eligible?

No. These students are not considered enrolled in an NSLP-participating school.

If a student was free or reduced last year and they were enrolled in my school district, but this year they attend a cyber charter school, are they still eligible?

No, because they are not currently enrolled in the district or in an NSLP-participating school. Cyber charter schools are not eligible to participate in NSLP.

My school offers grab and go meals for students that attend virtually. Is a student eligible for P-EBT if they are receiving grab and go meals?

Yes. Grab and go meals do not preclude a student from receiving P-EBT.

How does a student absence count toward recording the attendance on the data template?

Any day a student was not in person, whether they were absent or learning virtually, is considered virtual (not in-person). If that student was not in-person 100% of the days of the respective month, they will be marked as V for virtual. If the student was in-person some days and virtual the rest of the days, that student will be marked with a B for Blended.

Our school district is 100% in-person, but some students have chosen to continue participating virtually. Are these students eligible to receive any benefits?

If the student is still enrolled in the district but attending virtually or attending a cyber/virtual school under the authority of the district (therefore still enrolled in the district), they can receive P-EBT benefits if they are eligible for free or reduced-price meals.

How do I know if a student is eligible and for how much?

PDE suggests schools do not attempt to make this determination since there are so many possible scenarios. It is imperative the school provide the IU the data template with ALL currently enrolled students listed, completed data fields, and each student's current Free, Reduced, or Paid eligibility status. DHS will determine if the student is eligible by looking at instruction and Free, Reduced, or Paid eligibility from this year and/or last year.

What about childcare P-EBT? Do I include Pre-K or K students?

If students in Pre-K or K would normally be considered enrolled in your NSLP school, then include them. More information about P-EBT for childcare will be forthcoming for the general public but should have little to no impact on schools.

My district is CEP. What data do I submit?

CEP schools will submit the data template listing ALL currently enrolled students and their completed data fields. All enrolled students in CEP schools should be marked as being eligible for free meals.

In my district, some buildings are CEP and others are not. What data do I submit?

CEP buildings will submit the data template listing ALL currently enrolled students and their completed data fields. All enrolled students in CEP schools should be marked as being eligible for free meals.

Non-CEP buildings will submit the data template with ALL currently enrolled students listed, completed data fields, and each student’s current Free, Reduced, or Paid eligibility status.

Some schools participate in the CEP, where all students are eligible for free meals. Are all students attending CEP schools eligible for P-EBT benefits?

Not necessarily. Students enrolled in a CEP school are eligible for P-EBT benefits if they were in remote/virtual instruction for at least one day per month.

In our school, students were 100% virtual. In the middle of November 2020, we brought them back on a hybrid schedule: 2 days in person and 3 days virtual. How do I record their attendance?

For this example, in September 2020 and October 2020, all students will be marked as “Virtual” for 100% virtual. For November 2020, any student that followed the new instructional model (hybrid), will be marked as “Blended”. Students that chose to remain virtual and not hybrid will be marked as “Virtual”.

In our school, students were 100% in-person, but buildings had to periodically shift to virtual schedules due to school closures. How do we record attendance for these students?

If a student attended in-person 100% of the days for the respective month, the student will be marked as “In Person”. However, any student who was enrolled in the school but did not attend in-person **for any reason** (i.e., virtual learning, snow day that counts as a school day, or absent) at least one day of the month must be marked as “Blended”. If a student did not attend in person at all any days of the month, that student must be marked as “Virtual”.

In our school, students are remote except for a small group (subgroup) of students who attend in person 5 days a week. How do we record the attendance for these students?

Students who were 100% virtual will be recorded with a “Virtual”. However, students who attended in-person **every** school day for the respective month should be recorded as “In Person”. If any student from the subgroup who was enrolled in the school was not attending in-person for any reason (i.e., virtual learning or absent) at least one day of the month, they must be marked as “Blended”.

What resources are available to assist with determining how to resolve other scenarios not included in the above examples?

A scenarios chart is available on PEARS Download Forms that provides numerous examples of instructional models and how to record each on the data collection template.