



# PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | Mark Johnson, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*

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## Facts about Pandemic - Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT)

- North Carolina has been approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to begin a new program that will help families who have been economically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Pandemic - Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) Program will help families purchase food for their children.
- For children who are enrolled in a school that participates in the school breakfast and lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act and are already eligible for free or reduced-price meals at school, there is no application process to receive P-EBT benefits. The *Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020* authorized a data sharing agreement between the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS). The shared data was used to identify students who are eligible for P-EBT because they were eligible for free or reduced-price meals at their school at the time schools closed on March 16.
- P-EBT eligible families *already* receiving Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), sometimes known as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, will receive P-EBT benefits on their existing EBT card.
- P-EBT eligible families *not already* enrolled in FNS will receive a P-EBT card in the mail in the next few weeks. Families who receive a P-EBT card will first receive a letter from the NCDHHS explaining how to activate and use their card. The P-EBT card may be used to purchase food at EBT authorized retailers, including most major grocery stores.
- Families with one child will receive \$370.50 in P-EBT benefits provided over two installments; the first installment will account for a higher percentage of the \$370.50 as it will cover the school closure days in March and April 2020. The second installment will cover May through June 12, 2020. Families with multiple children will receive benefits on a single card, if possible, based on the number of eligible children in the household.
- The P-EBT Program will help supplement meals for children provided by schools and community organizations. Schools and community organizations will continue to offer and families may continue to participate in free meal programs for children during the period of unanticipated school closures due to COVID-19; these include grab-and-go or curbside meals at schools or community organizations or meals distributed to students by a yellow school bus or other distribution methods. Families can text FOODNC to 877-877 to find local meal sites. The service is also available in Spanish by texting COMIDA to 877-877.

### SCHOOL NUTRITION AND DISTRICT OPERATIONS DIVISIONS

Lynn Harvey, *Ed.D., RDN, LDN, FAND, SNS, Director* | [lynn.harvey@dpi.nc.gov](mailto:lynn.harvey@dpi.nc.gov)  
6324 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-6324 | Phone (919) 807-3506

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## **P-EBT Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What is P-EBT?**

The Pandemic - Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) Program will help families purchase food for their children while schools are closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The P-EBT Program provides funds on an electronic benefit card to families whose children are eligible for free or reduced-price meals at school. The P-EBT card will function like a standard EBT card. The same guidelines for using EBT cards will apply.

### **2. Who is eligible for P-EBT?**

Eligibility for P-EBT is based on two requirements. Households with one or more children who are (1) enrolled in a school that participates in school breakfast and lunch programs authorized under the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act and (2) qualify to receive free or reduced-price school meals at school are eligible for P-EBT. Both requirements must be met to be eligible for P-EBT.

### **3. Do families that already receive FNS benefits using an EBT card need to apply for the P-EBT program?**

There is no application process for the P-EBT Program. Families with children who were (1) enrolled in a school that participates in the school breakfast and lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act and were (2) eligible for free or reduced-price school meals at the time schools closed on March 16 that are *already receiving Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) benefits* will receive additional funds for P-EBT on their existing EBT card in the next few weeks.

P-EBT eligible families *not already enrolled* in FNS will be mailed a new EBT card in the next few weeks. Families who receive a new EBT card will first receive a letter in the mail from the NCDHHS explaining how to activate and use their card. The *Families First Coronavirus Response Act* authorized NCDPI to share student information with NCDHHS which will allow the P-EBT benefit to be sent directly to the households of eligible children, so no further action is required of these families.

### **4. Do all public schools in North Carolina participate in the school breakfast and lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act?**

No, not all schools participate in the National School Lunch Program (which includes the school breakfast and lunch program). For a list of schools that participate and whose students *may* be eligible for free or reduced-price school meal benefits, and ultimately P-EBT benefits, please visit the NCDPI, School Nutrition website at:

<https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/news-events/covid-19-coronavirus/p-ebt>

One of the requirements of the P-EBT Program is that the school in which the child is enrolled must participate in the school breakfast and lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act.

**5. My children were not eligible for free or reduced-price school meals before school closures, but I lost my job due to the COVID-19 pandemic and my household income is much less now than before the pandemic. Does my child(ren)/family qualify for P-EBT?**

Households that have lost income may qualify for P-EBT if their child(ren) (1) are enrolled in a school that participates in the National School Lunch Program and (2) receive approval for free or reduced-price school meals. While schools remain closed to students, families may apply for free or reduced-price school meal benefits for their children. If the application is approved, and students become eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, they are automatically eligible for P-EBT. No further application is required.

**6. How do I apply for free or reduced-price meals for my children?**

Applications for free and reduced-price school meals are available at schools or school districts that participate in the school breakfast and lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act. Schools that participate in these programs are shown at this link:

<https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/news-events/covid-19-coronavirus/p-ebt>

Contact school officials at the school your child attends or check the school or district website to learn how applications will be distributed and accepted. This process will vary by school or district. To apply, you will need to complete the application which will require you to include all sources of current household income (including unemployment benefits) and the total number of people living in the household. You will be notified by the school or district whether the application is approved; if approved, the information will be shared with NCDHHS and your family will receive P-EBT benefits on behalf of your child(ren). (Information about the Household Application may be found in the resource entitled: *Eligibility Manual for School Meals: Determining and Verifying Eligibility*, US Department of Agriculture, 2017.)

**7. My child attends a school that participates in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) where all students receive all meals at no cost. Is my family eligible for P-EBT?**

Yes, consistent with the instructions from the USDA, all students who attend a CEP-participating school will receive P-EBT benefits. The EBT card will be mailed to the household. (The CEP is a nutrition program under the National School Lunch Act.)

**8. What if a family does not want P-EBT benefits?**

Families who do not wish to use P-EBT benefits may destroy the EBT card when received or may return the card to the P-EBT vendor. There is no need to notify NCDPI or NCDHHS if a family chooses not to accept the P-EBT benefit. Should families reconsider and choose to use the benefits, they will be available for 365 days and the family may contact the call center at 1-888-622-7328 to request a replacement card.

**9. Will this benefit replace current benefits or meals families may be receiving at this time?**

The P-EBT Program is in addition to other benefits families may be receiving as well as other food assistance programs in which families may be currently participating. We encourage families to continue using local school and community meal sites for free, nutritious meals for children ages 18 and younger. Families may text FOODNC to 877-877 to find local meal sites. The service is also available in Spanish by texting COMIDA to 877-877.

## 10. How much will families receive in benefits?

A family with one child will receive \$193.80 for their first installment and \$176.70 for their second installment. The chart below provides additional information regarding benefits for families with multiple children.

# of Children Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals	1st Installment (34 Days)	2nd Installment (31 Days)
1 child	\$193.80	\$176.70
2 children	\$387.60	\$353.40
3 children	\$581.40	\$530.10
4 children	\$775.20	\$706.80
5 children	\$969.00	\$883.50
6 children	\$1,162.80	\$1,060.20

The first installment accounts for closed school days in March and April 2020. The second installment accounts for closed school days in May through June 2020. (Example: A family of three children enrolled in an eligible school and eligible for free or reduced-price meals at school will receive \$581.40 for their first installment and \$530.10 for their second installment.)

## 11. When will benefits be available?

NCDHHS is working to operationalize the program and P-EBT eligible families will receive the first installment in late May; the second installment will be received in late June 2020. Unused benefits will rollover month-to-month and must be used within 365 days.

## 12. What if my family has moved recently?

P-EBT benefits are being mailed to households based upon the address of the household that is on file at the school in which the child is enrolled. If the address associated with a child's school record is no longer correct, the undelivered P-EBT card may be returned to the P-EBT vendor. Counties will receive a report of the undeliverable cards and someone will attempt to contact households to supply a P-EBT card. If your household has moved recently and the address has not been updated at your child's school, please contact the school to make the necessary changes. Please be prepared to provide evidence of change in address when making this request to school officials.

## 13. I home school my child. Will I receive P-EBT benefits for him/her?

If your home-schooled child is also enrolled in a school that participates in the school breakfast and lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act, they may be eligible for P-EBT benefits. It would be necessary to complete a household application for free or reduced-price meals to determine eligibility. (See the response to Question 6 above for instructions for completing a household application for free or reduced-price meals.) If home-schooled students are not enrolled in a school that participates in the school breakfast and lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act, they are not eligible for P-EBT benefits.

**14. My child attends a non-public school. Will I receive P-EBT benefits for him/her?**

P-EBT is available for children who attend a school that participates in nutrition programs under the National School Lunch Act. Non-public schools in NC that participate in the school breakfast and lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act are shown at this site: <https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/news-events/covid-19-coronavirus/p-ebt>

**15. My child attends a charter school. Will I receive P-EBT benefits for him/her?**

P-EBT is available for children who attend a school that participates in nutrition programs under the National School Lunch Act. Charter schools in NC that participate in the nutrition programs under the National School Lunch Act (school breakfast and lunch programs) are shown at this site:

<https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/news-events/covid-19-coronavirus/p-ebt>

If your household is *already receiving* FNS benefits, an additional benefit *may* be added to your existing EBT card.

**16. How does this benefit affect children in foster care?**

All children who are enrolled in a school that participates in the school breakfast and lunch programs under the National School Lunch Act and are eligible for free or reduced-price meals at school are eligible for P-EBT benefits. This includes children in foster care. Children in foster care congregate settings will have the same address, however they will not be linked as a household and will receive individual P-EBT cards.

**17. Will families have to pay this back?**

No. Families who receive P-EBT benefits will not have to pay back the benefit.

**18. I did not complete a household application for free or reduced-price meal benefits this past school year, but my child has received free meals at school this year? Do I need to complete an application for meal benefits at school?**

If your child attends a school that participates in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which is a program under the National School Lunch Act, it is not necessary to complete a household application. Your child's information has already been provided to the NCDHHS to issue P-EBT benefits. Schools participating in the CEP are shown at this link:

<https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/news-events/covid-19-coronavirus/p-ebt>

If your child does not attend a school that participates in the CEP, it will be necessary to complete a household application for free or reduced-price meal benefits; upon being approved for meal benefits by the school's Determining Official, the child/household will be eligible for P-EBT benefits.

## Where do I go for additional information?

Please visit the NCDHHS's Pandemic Electronic Benefit (P-EBT) website at: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/public-health/covid19/assistance/p-ebt>

You may call the **State's 2-1-1** hotline or call 1-888-892-1162 from any phone to inquire about resources that may be available to you or your family. The call is free, confidential and available in any language.