



Food and Nutrition  
Service

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June 3, 2021

**SUBJECT:** Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Program (P-EBT)  
Approval of California's State Plan for School Children

**TO:** Jesus Mendoza, Jr.  
Regional Administrator  
Western Regional Office

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127; the Act) as amended by the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2021 and Other Extensions Act (P.L. 116-159) and the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260) authorized the continuation of a temporary assistance program for households with children affected by school closures during the public health emergency that was declared on January 27, 2020. Pursuant to the authority granted under Section 1101 of the Act, FNS approves California's enclosed plan to operate P-EBT for school children.

### **Summary of State's Plan**

The California Department of Social Services and the California Department of Education will issue P-EBT benefits through the State's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) EBT card system to current SNAP households and non-SNAP households with eligible children. The State's plan covers the months of August 2020 through May 2021.

Children are eligible 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 SY 2019-2020 eligibility data will have a means to address that they do not issue benefits to last year's graduates and 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, California has or will:

- tentatively issue benefits for the months of August 2020 through January 2021 in the months of August and September 2021:
  - benefits for the months of August and September 2020 are supplements to the benefits that the State already issued under the

State's previously approved August-September 2020 P-EBT plan; these include:

- benefits for children who recently received benefits for the spring of 2020 under the State's April 2021 plan amendment,
  - benefits for children who were covered by the State's August-September 2020 plan but were omitted by error,
  - benefits for children determined eligible for free or reduced price school meals since September 2020, and
  - an additional \$0.96 for each eligible child on each virtual learning day in August and September to account for the January 2021 increase in P-EBT's daily benefit,
- tentatively issue benefits for the months of February through May 2021 in November,
  - collect school operating status data from all public, charter and private schools for each month of the school year through a data collection effort developed specifically to support P-EBT:
    - schools will report their status as all virtual, hybrid, or all in-person based on the instructional model that applied to a majority of the school's students in the month,
  - follow up with schools and school districts that do not provide school status information in order to solicit a response; for schools and school districts that do not respond to the State's follow-up request, the State will:
    - populate missing fields using public sources, if available, or
    - use the enrollment weighted average status reported by schools of the same level (elementary/middle or high) in the same county,
  - use monthly school-level status to set a common benefit for all eligible children in the school:
    - the State set a constant 18 day monthly benefit for children with fully virtual schedules by averaging the number of instructional days in the year over the number of benefit months;
    - the State set a constant hybrid benefit equal to 55% of the virtual benefit based on hybrid schedule information collected in April from a representative sample of school districts.

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.

California estimates that it will issue \$4.3 billion to approximately 4.0 million children for school closures and reductions in attendance and hours extending from August 2020 through May 2021.

**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 California. 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**

California 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**

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

FNS appreciates California’s commitment to meet the nutritional needs of children during a challenging time. If you have questions, please contact the FNS Western Regional Office.

Sincerely,

Cindy Long  
Deputy Administrator  
Child Nutrition Programs