



Food and Nutrition
Service

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March 17, 2022

SUBJECT: Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer Program (P-EBT)
Approval of Massachusetts' State Plan for School Children,
School Year 2021-2022

TO: Lizbeth Silbermann
Regional Administrator
Northeast Regional Office

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (P.L. 116-127; the Act), as amended, authorized a temporary assistance program for households with children without access to meals in school and to certain SNAP-enrolled children in child care during the public health emergency declared on January 27, 2020. Pursuant to the authority granted under Section 1101 of the Act, FNS approves Massachusetts' enclosed plan to operate P-EBT for school children.

Summary of State's Plan

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will issue P-EBT benefits through the State's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) EBT card system to households with eligible children. The State's plan for school children covers the months of September 2021 through June 2022.

School children are eligible for benefits 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 eligibility data from the most recent prior year will have a means to address that they do not issue benefits to school year 2020-2021 graduates and other 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, Massachusetts will:

- use schools' most current free and reduced price eligibility lists to identify students who may qualify for P-EBT benefits:
 - newly certified students will be eligible for P-EBT benefits retroactive to the beginning of the school year in recognition that households had

- no reason to apply for meal benefits prior to approval of the state's P-EBT plan,
- collect student-level P-EBT-eligible days from schools:
 - most schools are tracking COVID-related absences and virtual learning days; these schools will provide actual counts of these P-EBT-eligible days for each student:
 - this includes days that a school temporarily closes or switches to remote learning due to COVID,
 - relatively few schools are not tracking COVID-related absences and virtual learning days; these schools will provide the length of any excused absence of 5 or more consecutive days for each student:
 - households of students in these schools may make a claim for any COVID-related absence or virtual learning period that is less than 5 consecutive days:
 - the family will attest on a state-provided form that the absences or virtual days are COVID-related and will submit the form to their school,
 - the school will verify that the days were excused absences prior to submitting those days to the state for payment of P-EBT benefits,
 - the school and state will ensure that payments are not claimed by more than one parent or guardian through this process,
 - issue benefits in one of three tiers for each student based on the student's number of P-EBT eligible days:
 - students with 1-5 P-EBT-eligible days will receive a benefit equal to 3 days of missed school meals,
 - students with 6-15 P-EBT-eligible days will receive a benefit equal to 10 days of missed school meals, and
 - students with 16 or more P-EBT-eligible days will receive a benefit equal to 18 days of missed school meals (180 instructional days divided by the 10 benefit months of September through June),
 - tentatively issue benefits for the months of September through March in a single distribution in late May,
 - issue benefits for the rest of the school year on a monthly basis:
 - schools will submit students' P-EBT-eligible days to the state by the 10th of the month following the benefit month,
 - the state will issue benefits on the 25th of the month following the benefit month.

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.

- Massachusetts estimates that it will issue \$22.7 million to approximately 478,600 children for school closures and reductions in attendance and hours extending from September 2021 through June 2022.

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 Massachusetts. 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

Massachusetts 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

Massachusetts 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 Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance 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 Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance will complete the FNS-292B, the FNS-46, the FNS-388, and the FNS-778 reports in accordance with existing requirements.

FNS appreciates Massachusetts' exceptional efforts to maintain children's access to nutritious meals, and understands that even as the nation recovers from this difficult

time, State agencies and local program operators will still face any number of challenges. FNS stands ready to provide additional support as needed. If you have questions, please contact the FNS Northeast Regional Office.

Sincerely,

Cindy Long
Administrator