

Documenting P-EBT Implementation in Montana



Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) is a new state option launched in the spring of 2020 to address the food needs of low-income children during COVID-related school closures by providing directly to families receiving free or reduced-price meals the value of missed breakfasts and lunches via a SNAP-like benefit card. Every state, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands implemented P-EBT. Though precise national outcome data are not yet available, states, under a very tight time frame, with limited and evolving federal guidance, and during a period of unprecedented difficulty, did a remarkable job implementing P-EBT. The program delivered some \$7 to \$10 billion in food assistance to up to 30 million school children.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Food Research & Action Center conducted a rapid assessment project to document the development and implementation of P-EBT. The project identified the various approaches states took to implement P-EBT, as well as key preliminary lessons state officials and other stakeholders have learned, to inform states and others as they implement P-EBT for the 2020-2021 school year.

Other resources from the project can be found at www.cbpp.org/pebt and www.frac.org/pebt.

Information below about Montana is based on publicly available materials and two survey responses representing the SNAP agency and Child Nutrition agency perspectives about how P-EBT operated for the 2019-2020 school year. The information has not been confirmed by the SNAP agency. We will update this information to reflect any corrections or clarifications we receive from states.

For more information on Montana's P-EBT program, [click here](#).

Montana

Feature	Description
Basics	
Plan approval date	June 26, 2020
Benefit issuance date range	July - September
Number of children eligible for P-EBT	48,385
Maximum P-EBT benefit (per child)	\$330.00
Potential total benefits to households	\$16 million
Existing benefit program data used for	SNAP Foster Care Homeless/Migrant
Method for households approved for F/RP school meals but not receiving SNAP (or another benefit program listed above)	Direct issuance Application (for children missed by direct issuance)
Application (or other information collection form)	
Information-gathering period	Until September 21
Submission method(s)	Online Phone

Montana

Feature	Description
	Paper
Language(s) offered besides English	Unknown
Requested information (application) elements	First and last name for HOH First and last name for student(s) DOB for student(s) Current mailing address School district Signature School name
Eligibility and Outreach	
Pre-K students included*	No
Newly eligible families included	No
Enrollment process for newly eligible students	Not applicable
Types of state outreach conducted	Press release(s) Webinars Website Social media School district outreach/flyers at meal distribution sites School district email messages Public service announcements Through partnerships with advocacy groups Through partnerships with community-based service providers
Data and Systems	
Student data source(s)	Centralized student data system Student data files from school districts Student data files from individual schools
Eligibility confirmation process	Age Student status Data match with CEP Data match with lists of F/RP school meals
SNAP system modifications required for P-EBT	Bypassed eligibility system
P-EBT Card Issuance	
P-EBT card appearance	Same as SNAP
EBT vendor	Solutran
Who P-EBT cards are issued to	HOH - one card per student
Card activation methods	Create PIN number
Number of issuances	1

Troubleshooting with Families

Mechanism(s) for inquiries	Call center Email inbox
Lead agency for troubleshooting	SNAP state agency
Staff time investment**	5-10 dedicated FTE

Source: Survey of states, publicly available materials, and/or interviews with select state officials

Notes: *For Spring 2020 P-EBT, pre-K children were eligible only if they attended a pre-K program that participated in the National School Lunch Program. **The information on staff time (FTEs) should be viewed with caution as it appears that survey respondents may have interpreted the question in different ways.

Updated October 30, 2020

Glossary

CEP: The Community Eligibility Provision is a federal option that allows high-poverty school districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students at some or all schools without collecting household applications. Reimbursements are based on the share of students directly certified for free or reduced-price meals (as explained in the next entry).

Direct certification: Children participating in certain programs (SNAP, TANF, Medicaid in some states, Foster Care, Homeless/Migrant, and Head Start) may or must be automatically enrolled for free or reduced-price school meals based on a data matching process or information from a relevant official instead of a household application.

Direct issuance: Issuing P-EBT benefits to eligible households without requiring a parent/guardian to take any action, such as submitting an application. Some states referred to this as “automatic issuance.” It includes benefits loaded onto existing SNAP cards and benefits loaded onto new P-EBT cards that were mailed to families.

DOB: Date of birth

F/RP: Free or reduced-price school breakfasts and lunches provided through the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program and available to children with household incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty line.

HOH: Head of household of the student(s); another term for parent/guardian.

Homeless/Migrant: Children who receive educational support through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, or the Migrant Education Program are eligible for free meals and may be directly certified.

P-EBT: The Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer program was created in the March 2020 Families First Coronavirus Response Act to provide families with benefits they can use to buy groceries to replace the free or reduced-price breakfasts and lunches their children missed while schools were closed for in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic in the 2019-2020 school year.

SNAP: The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is a federal entitlement program designed to supplement the food budgets of low-income households.

SSN: Social Security number

TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is a federal block grant provided to states to provide cash assistance and other support to very low-income households with children. Recipients of TANF cash assistance are eligible for free school meals and may be directly certified.