

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services

Economic Services Administration • Community Services Division

Program Description

Pandemic EBT, or P-EBT, is a program that provides food benefits to children who are eligible for free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program but had limited access to onsite meals at their school or child care center due to the COVID-19 pandemic. P-EBT benefits help Washington families affected by these closures to buy food and support their basic nutritional needs. The method in which P-EBT was implemented changed significantly during the 2019-20 through 2021-22 school years.

As part of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act in March 2020, USDA approved P-EBT benefits to families affected by school closures from March 2020 through June 2020. Beginning June 28, 2020, DSHS worked with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to verify student eligibility for free or reduced-price school meals and internally processed applications and issued benefits for households who qualified. For this iteration, known as P-EBT 1.0, DSHS accepted applications until Sept. 30, 2020, although some cases were processed after this date. Additional information can be found in the [SFY 2020 ESA Briefing Book](#).

P-EBT continued in the 2020-21 school year (September 2020 through June 2021) with new provisions passed through the Continuing Appropriations Act 2021 and Other Extensions Act, the Consolidated Appropriations Act 2021, and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021. These acts provided new guidance for P-EBT, including the expansion to SNAP-recipient children under the age of 6 and Summer P-EBT benefits. USDA approved Washington's P-EBT 2.0 plans for schools in March 2021, for children under age 6 in June 2021, and for Summer P-EBT in July 2021. DSHS shifted from internal eligibility determination to contracting with Accenture, a third-party vendor. Accenture coordinated free and reduced-price lunch eligibility with OSPI and individual school districts. This coordination enabled eligible children to receive P-EBT benefits directly, without an application requirement, using a unique P-EBT card outside of DSHS eligibility systems.

For the 2021-22 school year, Proclamation 21-05 required Washington public K-12 schools to offer in-person, full-time instruction. USDA released guidance for P-EBT 3.0 based on COVID-related absences throughout the school year; Washington and several other states lack the level of data and resources necessary to determine

P-EBT eligibility for school-age children under the new guidance. USDA approved plans for SNAP-recipient children under age 6 and for Summer P-EBT for children under age 6 and school-age children in July 2022. Washington did not receive approval to operate P-EBT for school-age children during the 2021-22 school year due to inability to meet USDA requirements to verify which absences and remote learning days were COVID-related.

Highlights

- In the 2021-22 school year, Washington issued a total of \$565,413,653 to eligible children under the school P-EBT plan and \$191,806,875 to eligible children under the age of 6.

More information:

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