

Wolf Administration Submits State Plan Request to Support Food Access for Students During COVID-19 Crisis

Harrisburg, PA – The departments of Human Services and Education today submitted a state plan to the Food and Nutrition Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to students who are eligible to receive free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program. This program, known as Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT), is temporary and is designed to bridge the gap left by schools closing due to the COVID-19 crisis.

“Schools may be closed for the rest of the year because of COVID-19, but students still need to eat breakfast and lunch,” said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. “The Wolf Administration is committed to doing everything in its power to make sure that families have the resources they need during this public health crisis. I am calling on the USDA to approve this plan quickly so we can get this benefit in into the hands of parents who need it.”

If approved by the USDA, this state plan would allow for DHS to provide P-EBT to households with children who have temporarily lost access to free or reduced-price school meals through the National School Lunch Program due to pandemic-related school closures. P-EBT benefits would be issued through EBT cards issued to qualifying families. A family’s benefit would be determined based off the federal reimbursement rate for the daily rate of free school breakfasts and lunches, or approximately \$5.70 per child. As requested, this benefit would be calculated for the remainder of the school year, leading to an approximate benefit of \$365 per child.

“As families adapt to the commonwealth’s school closures and students adjust to learning at home, parents and guardians shouldn’t have to be concerned about accessing nutritious meals for their children,” Education Secretary Pedro A. Rivera said. “The Department of Education is proud to be able to partner with DHS to ensure that our students continue to be served during the pandemic-related closures.”

This state plan request was developed in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), who administers the National School Lunch Program in Pennsylvania. DHS has determined that approximately 680,000 students who receive free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch throughout the school year are eligible for P-EBT based on current participation in SNAP or Medicaid. Additionally, students who otherwise qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches will qualify for P-EBT if approved. All told, P-EBT will allow DHS to provide funds to cover the cost of breakfast and lunch for approximately 958,000 Pennsylvania school-aged children.

Governor Wolf previously [announced](#) the issuance of emergency SNAP benefits April 16. DHS is continuing to process applications for SNAP and encourages people and families who need assistance to apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us. Emergency applications for SNAP can be expedited in five days, and all Pennsylvanians who are in a difficult financial situation due to the economic challenges of this pandemic should apply to see if they are eligible for assistance.

Pennsylvanians who need help feeding themselves or their family can also find and contact their local food bank or pantry through [Feeding Pennsylvania](#) and [Hunger-Free Pennsylvania](#) to access food resources in their community.

Visit pa.gov for a [“Responding to COVID-19” guide](#) or the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s dedicated [Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19.