

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | March 29, 2021

N.D. announces Pandemic-EBT food assistance for children who are eligible for free and reduced-price school meals this school year

BISMARCK, N.D. – State School Superintendent Kirsten Baesler and Department of Human Services Executive Director Chris Jones on Monday announced a new food assistance program for families whose children have been eligible for free or reduced-price school meals during the current school year.

The Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program provides Electronic Benefits Transfer cards to eligible families. The cards may be used to buy food. Families of children who were eligible for free or reduced-price meals at school during the current school year will be eligible. Families will receive benefits for days that students in the household are distance learning at home, rather than being in the school building.

Families do not need to apply for the benefit. Schools are presently gathering information about which students qualify for free or reduced-price school meals. Eligible households will be receiving letters to notify them about the P-EBT benefit, and they will be mailed EBT cards in the coming weeks.

The benefit will equal \$6.82 for each day a student has been learning through distance instruction. The amount is the current daily federal reimbursement that schools receive per student for providing a free breakfast, lunch, and after-school snack.

The Department of Public Instruction estimates that about 31,400 North Dakota students will qualify for the P-EBT benefit. Benefit amounts for each student “will really depend on the school district’s learning plan,” said Linda Schloer, director of child nutrition for the NDDPI.

Michele Gee, director of the Department of Human Services’ Economic Assistance Division, said the benefit is intended to replace the value of meals the students would have received had they been able to attend school in person.

The EBT cards may be used to buy food at retailers that are approved to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. These retailers include most grocery stores and farmers’ markets. The rules that govern allowable food purchases with SNAP benefits also apply to the P-EBT benefits.

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"We continue to actively work to prevent hunger in North Dakota and are pleased to be able to offer Pandemic-EBT food assistance in coordination with DPI for this school year," Jones said.

"Good nutrition is essential for a student's education," Baesler said. "It is difficult to pay attention and learn if you are hungry. That goes both for children and adults. This program is a welcome addition to North Dakota's hunger-fighting efforts."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently approved North Dakota's plan to operate the program, which was approved by Congress last year and signed into law in December 2020.

Families who have questions about eligibility can contact the NDDPI's P-EBT hotline at (701) 328-2732, 711 (TTY). Questions about EBT cards should be directed to the DHS economic assistance division at SNAP-PEBT@nd.gov.

Following pandemic-related school closures during 2019-2020 school year, DHS issued P-EBT benefits totaling \$9.5 million to about 36,750 North Dakota children. The department partnered with the NDDPI and local schools to identify and notify eligible families.

Individuals and families with lower incomes or whose incomes have been affected by the pandemic can find information about other resources that can help their household budgets, including child care assistance, heating assistance and SNAP, at www.nd.gov/dhs/services/financialhelp. For information about rental assistance and other resources and services supporting North Dakotans affected by the pandemic, visit ndresponse.gov/covid-19-resources.

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