



## Pennsylvania Summer EBT 2024 (SUN Bucks) Frequently Asked Questions - Schools

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## Pennsylvania Summer EBT 2024 (SUN Bucks) Frequently Asked Questions - Schools

### Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) Benefit Questions

#### **Q: What is SUN Bucks?**

A: In December 2022, a bipartisan Congress authorized a new, permanent program for States, U.S. territories, and certain tribal nations to provide food dollars to low-income families with school-age children over the summer months.

The program, called Summer-EBT, and now officially SUN Bucks, is proven to reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition of children on summer break.

The program was successfully tested by USDA in a group of states for several years and through the summer component of P-EBT. USDA evaluation shows that there was a 33% decrease in children's food hardship after benefits were issued, and that 2.7-3.9 million children were lifted out of hunger.

Starting in summer 2024, States, territories, and certain tribal nations can provide \$40 per summer month (\$120 total) per child to families with eligible school-age children for them to buy groceries, similar to how SNAP benefits are used. SUN Bucks will work together with other USDA nutrition programs to connect every eligible child with nutritious food in the summer.

Pennsylvania is one of 46 entities that will launch SUN Bucks in the summer of 2024.

#### **Q: What students are eligible for SUN Bucks in 2024?**

A: To receive the \$120 SUN Bucks benefit for the summer of 2024, a student must be enrolled in a school that participates in the NSLP **and** qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on DC (SNAP, TANF or MA with qualifying income), categorical eligibility (homeless, foster, migrant, runaway or Head Start), or a household application for free/reduced school meals during the 2023-2024 School Year.

Families whose children attended an NSLP-participating school in 2023-2024 but were not identified as DC, categorically eligible, or approved for free or reduced-price meals via a household application must apply for SUN Bucks through DHS.

If the student is not enrolled in an NSLP-participating school, they must be eligible to be DC **and** be of compulsory school age (6-18 years). This is determined by DHS and is not a school responsibility.



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### **Q: Who receives the SUN Bucks benefit for a student that is DC-Extended from another student's file?**

A: The SUN Bucks card will be sent to the primary guardian of the student, as listed on the school's SUN Bucks file submission.

### **Q: Do all CEP students receive the SUN Bucks benefit in 2024?**

A: No. Even though CEP students receive free meals during the regular school year, they must be DC or categorically eligible to automatically receive the 2024 SUN Bucks benefit. Otherwise, the household must apply for SUN Bucks through DHS.

### **Q: Do Head Start or other pre-K students receive SUN Bucks benefit?**

A: Yes. Head Start and/or other pre-K students will receive SUN Bucks **if** the student attends a program that participates in NSLP and/or SBP and is eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Head Start students are categorically eligible for free meals.

### **Q: How much will eligible students receive, and when will they receive it?**

A: Each household will receive \$120 per eligible child (the equivalent of \$40 per summer month). DHS will begin issuing the benefits beginning around mid-August through September 2024. Benefits are expunged four (4) months after date of issuance.

### **Q: Do all eligible students/families need to apply for 2024 SUN Bucks benefit?**

A: No. Most eligible students do not need to apply for 2024 SUN Bucks. Students in the following categories will automatically receive SUN Bucks:

- Students enrolled in a school that participates in the NSLP and were determined eligible for free or reduced-price meals via DC, categorical eligibility, or a household application for free/reduced school meals during the 2023-2024 School Year. Families that are not DC, categorically eligible, or approved for free or reduced-price meals via a household application for free/reduced school meals must apply through DHS for SUN Bucks.
- Students not enrolled in an NSLP-participating school but eligible to be DC and of compulsory school age (6-18 years).



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### **Q: How do families apply for 2024 SUN Bucks benefit?**

A: Only families who are not eligible according to the question immediately above should apply. To apply for SUN Bucks for summer 2024, families will need to complete a SUN Bucks application through DHS. When it is ready, the application will be available as a fillable PDF in both English and Spanish on the DHS SUN Bucks webpage and paper copies will also be available upon request at the CAO. CAO addresses can be found at <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/services/assistance/pages/cao-contact.aspx>.

The application is expected to be available July 1, 2024.

### **NEW Q: Can the SUN Bucks family application be provided in other languages, such as Ukrainian or Russian?**

A: The application will be available in English and Spanish in 2024. This request will be shared with DHS for the future. However, due to the rapid implementation for the program in 2024, other languages beyond the two will not be possible.

### **Q: How will students receive 2024 SUN Bucks benefits?**

A: Students whose families already receive SNAP benefits or TANF cash benefits will receive SUN Bucks on the household's regular EBT card, if possible. If a student is eligible due to Medical Assistance with qualifying income or benefits cannot be added to an existing SNAP or TANF EBT card, a SUN Bucks card will be sent to the address on file with DHS.

Otherwise, benefits will be loaded on a SUN Bucks card and sent to the household address listed in the school's SUN Bucks file or the address on the SUN Bucks application the family submitted to DHS.

Unlike P-EBT, DHS will be issuing benefits at the household level, so if a household has three eligible children, all three children's benefits will be loaded onto a single SUN Bucks card if possible.

### **Q: Can SUN Bucks benefits be used at school to purchase school meals?**

A: No. SUN Bucks can only be used for the same purchases as SNAP. The card can only be used at approved food retailers, predominantly grocery stores and convenience stores. SNAP benefits and SUN Bucks cannot be used to purchase hot, prepared foods,



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even at grocery stores and convenience stores. Both SNAP benefits and SUN Bucks can be used to purchase seeds.

### **NEW Q: Why is the 2024 Summer EBT benefit issuance so late in the summer?**

A: New processes and systems are being implemented for this new program. Families are asked to have patience and understanding during this implementation year. The intent is for the benefit to be issued earlier in the summer break in future years.

## Role of School Questions

### **Q: What role do schools play for SUN Bucks?**

A: Schools that participate in the NSLP must submit a 2024 SUN Bucks file between June 1, 2024, and June 30, 2024. It is critical that this data be complete and accurate since it is a primary source DHS uses to determine SUN Bucks benefits for students. The accuracy of the data that schools provide is essential to the success of the SUN Bucks roll-out.

Families may sometimes contact schools with SUN Bucks questions. Schools can assist families with general questions by directing them to the DHS SUN Bucks webpage. It is recommended that schools post information on their school website or via email to parents/guardians (see related question: *What best practices should schools follow to inform families about Summer EBT?*)

When a parent/guardian contacts a school with a specific SUN Bucks question about their child, the school should first confirm that they submitted correct data for the student in their SUN Bucks file. The school should contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk ([sebt@csc.csiu.org](mailto:sebt@csc.csiu.org) or 800-683-5100) if they find errors in the data they submitted for a student. If their student data was accurate, they should guide the parent/guardian to contact their local CAO or the Statewide Customer Service Center at 1-877-395-8930, or 1-215-560-7226 in Philadelphia. Parents can find their CAO contact information at <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/services/assistance/pages/cao-contact.aspx>.

### **Q: How many 2024 SUN Bucks files do schools need to submit and when?**

A: All schools that participate in NSLP must submit one (1) 2024 SUN Bucks school enrollment file for the 2023-2024 School Year. The file must include all students enrolled at any time during the school year at all sites covered by the school's 2023-2024 School



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Nutrition Agreement. Fully virtual instruction students and home-schooled students should not be included. However, there may be exceptions if these students are also enrolled for in-person classes and participate in the meal program. Schools should contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk to discuss specific scenarios. The data collection window for submitting this file is from June 1, 2024 – June 30, 2024.

### **Q: How do schools submit their 2024 SUN Bucks file?**

A: To submit 2024 SUN Bucks files schools will first prepare their file according to the 2024 SUN Bucks data collection template. This template was emailed to all schools from PDE on 3/7/2024 but can also be downloaded at <https://www.pasebt.com>, under the *Data Collection Template* icon or in the Download Forms section of the CN PEARS site.

Once the file is prepared, the school should upload it using the *Upload File* icon at <https://www.pasebt.com>. The user is required to fill out a short form where the school's SUN Bucks password, AUN, and user identifying information are entered. The user then selects *Choose File* to pull in the prepared file from the location where it is stored on their computer, then *Upload*.

During the upload process, the data in the school's file is verified in real-time against the requirements of the data collection template. Any data errors are presented to the user on the screen. All errors must be corrected before the file passes the validation process. When the file passes, the user receives a success message on the screen and a confirmation email.

### **NEW Q: Where can schools obtain materials such as the SUN Bucks file template, April webinar slides and recording, family letters, etc.?**

A: At <https://www.pasebt.com>, or in the Download Forms section of CN PEARS, or by contacting the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk.

### **Q. If my school is a full PA-SES user, will I be able to pull the information from PA-SES?**

A: Full PA-SES users will be provided with a Dynamic Query to pull the data. The data must still be reviewed and converted to a CSV file for the upload.



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### **Q: What are the main differences between the SUN Bucks data files that schools will submit versus the past P-EBT data files?**

A: The files are similar but have these differences:

- The SUN Bucks file is CSV format versus Excel (.xlsx).
- Fully virtual students enrolled in programs that are not considered NSLP sites must not be included in the file (i.e. district virtual academies). However, there may be exceptions if the student is also enrolled for in-person classes and participate in the meal program. Schools should contact the helpdesk to discuss.
- The Secondary Parent columns have been removed.
- The SUN Bucks file columns have been re-arranged a bit – for example, the SFA (LEA) Name and AUN columns are now first.
- Attendance or days missed due to COVID are no longer relevant.

### **Updated Q: What about childcare SUN Bucks? Should schools include Pre-K students or Head Start students in their SUN Bucks file?**

A: Any child who attends an NSLP participating school and is offered school meals that the school claims, must be included in the school's SUN Bucks file, even if the child is outside the compulsory age range (6 – 18 years old).

If the school who feeds and claims the meals for the student does not have all the student information needed for the SUN Bucks file, they should obtain the necessary data from the other entity who oversees the pre-k or Head Start program.

### **Q: Should fully virtual students be reported on SUN Bucks files?**

A: No. Fully virtual students enrolled in programs that are not NSLP must not be included in the school's SUN Bucks file. Examples: virtual academies run by districts. However, there may be exceptions if the students are also enrolled for in-person classes and participate in the meal program. Schools should contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk to discuss specific scenarios.

Fully virtual students are typically only eligible for SUN Bucks if the household is already receiving a qualifying state assistance benefit (SNAP, TANF, or MA with qualifying income) and they are in the compulsory age range of 6-18 years. DHS will determine this.





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### **Q: Should schools include home schooled students in their SUN Bucks files?**

A: No. Home schooled students should not be included in a school's SUN Bucks file. However, there may be exceptions if the students are also enrolled for in-person classes and participate in the meal program. Schools should contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk to discuss specific scenarios.

Home schooled students typically are only eligible for SUN Bucks if the household is already receiving a qualifying state assistance benefit (SNAP, TANF, or MA with qualifying income) and are in the compulsory age range of 6-18 years. DHS will determine this.

### **New Q: Should schools report students who they place out at other educational entities?**

A: No, not if the student is placed at the other entity for the whole school year. The other entity should report the student on their SUN Bucks file if they are an NSLP-participating school and they offer school meals to the student and claim them.

If the original sending school feeds and claims meals for the student at any time during the year, they should report the student on their file.

### **New Q: What about situations where one school instructs a student and another school feeds and claims meals for the same student? For example, an IU may use space to teach a classroom in a district school building and the district feeds and claims meals for the students under their School Nutrition Program. Who reports the students for SUN Bucks?**

A: In this example, the district that feeds and claims meals for the students in the IU's classroom would report the students on their SUN Bucks student file.

### **New Q: Do Approved Private Schools need to report their students for SUN Bucks?**

A: Yes, if the school participates in the National School Lunch Program.

### **New Q: Should students who withdrew during the school year be included in the SUN Bucks student file? Why? And should graduating seniors be included?**

A: Yes. DHS needs a complete record of student enrollments from schools in order to confirm that any given student attended an NSLP-participating school at some point





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during the 2023-2024 school year (which they are required to do for the SUN Bucks program). The complete student record also assists DHS when they are attempting to help parents/guardians who contact them with their benefit questions.

Yes, graduating seniors should be included, like all other enrolled students from the 2023-2024 school year.

### **Q: Where will SUN Bucks benefits for homeless, runaway, migrant, and foster students be sent, and what address should schools list for these students?**

A: In most cases, these students will be on the state's DC file, so the benefits will be added to the SNAP or TANF EBT card of the household/entity which claims the student for these benefits. If the student is MA with qualifying income, the benefits will be loaded on a SUN Bucks EBT card and issued to the address on file with DHS.

If the student is not on the state's DC file, but the school reported the student as "Free" (since they are categorically eligible for free school meals), DHS will load the benefits on a SUN Bucks EBT card and mail it to the address the school reported for the student.

Schools can decide what address to report for homeless, runaway, migrant, or foster students based on the student's circumstances:

- The address where the student is living if it is anticipated the address will be appropriate when benefits are issued in mid-August, or;
- The school's address so that staff may distribute any SUN Bucks cards that are issued to the student, or;
- A general delivery address at the main post office nearest the student that holds general delivery mail for pickup. The U.S. Postal Service location search tool (<https://tools.usps.com/find-location.htm>) can be used to determine if a given post office offers general delivery service. The general delivery address format is Student name, GENERAL DELIVERY, City, State, Zip.

### **Q: What best practices should schools follow to inform families about SUN Bucks?**

A: PDE will develop a letter template that schools should use to initially communicate information about SUN Bucks to eligible families. There will be a letter for CEP and non-CEP schools since the verbiage will be different for each. The letter will include a link to DHS's SUN Bucks webpage for households. The use of digital platforms (text/email) to communicate with families would be best.



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### **Q: What should a school do if a family approaches them about a denial of benefits they receive from DHS for SUN Bucks?**

A: The school must inform the family that DHS is the administering agency for SUN Bucks and that the school cannot assist with benefit information. The SUN Bucks School Helpdesk cannot assist the family either. The family should be redirected back to the DHS denial letter, which outlines the timeline and procedure for appealing the eligibility decision. A family will only receive a denial if they submit a SUN Bucks application. The denial could be for several reasons, such as the family being over income, not signing or completing the SUN Bucks application, the child not being enrolled in an eligible school, or already being eligible for SUN Bucks.

### **Q: How can a school help a family who claims they never received the SUN Bucks benefit even though their child did receive free or reduced meals during the school year?**

A: The school should first confirm that they submitted correct data for the student in their SUN Bucks file. The school should contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk ([sebt@csc.csiu.org](mailto:sebt@csc.csiu.org) or 800-683-5100) if they find errors in the data they submitted for a student. The Helpdesk will work with the school and DHS to make a correction and determine if the student is indeed eligible for the benefit. If the school does not find any errors in the data they submitted for the student, they should guide the parent/guardian to contact their local CAO or the Statewide Customer Service Center at 1-877-395-8930, or 1-215-560-7226 in Philadelphia. Parents can find their CAO contact information at <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/services/assistance/pages/cao-contact.aspx>.

### **New Q: How can a school help a family who claims the address the school has on file is wrong and is different than the one DHS has on file, and they never received the SUN Bucks benefit?**

A: If the family has a SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid case with qualifying income, they will be on the state DC file and DHS will use the family address they have on file, regardless of what address the school has. In these cases, the family must contact their local County Assistance Office (CAO) to correct their address and discuss their missing SUN Bucks benefit.

DHS will use the school's family address for students who are DC by extension, income eligible from a household meal application or are categorically eligible. Schools should make sure these addresses are current prior to submitting the SUN Bucks student file in



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June. After submission, if the school does discover a wrong student address for a student who falls into these categories, they should contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk to discuss.

### **Q: Who should schools contact with questions?**

A: Schools may contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk from 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM, Monday through Friday, except holidays: 800-683-5100 or [sebt@csc.csiu.org](mailto:sebt@csc.csiu.org).

The helpdesk will be operated by the CSC division of CSIU. CSIU will play a similar role as they did for P-EBT. They will serve as the SUN Bucks first point of contact for schools. CSIU will assist schools with the SUN Bucks data submission process, monitor timely submission of data, assist schools with communicating with families, and research data inquiries that are requested by the DHS.

Families must not contact CSIU with questions, and the goal is that they do not contact the school with SUN Bucks questions. DHS will set up a mechanism for families through an appeal and/or inquiry process.

## Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) School Questions

### **Q: Will all CEP students receive the SUN Bucks benefit in 2024?**

A: No. Even though CEP students receive free meals during the regular school year, they must be DC or categorically eligible to automatically receive 2024 SUN Bucks. Otherwise, the household must apply for SUN Bucks through DHS.

### **Q: We are a CEP school and for P-EBT we reported all our students as “Free.” Is that how we report our students for 2024 SUN Bucks?**

A: No. For 2024 SUN Bucks, CEP schools must report students who are DC or categorically eligible for free or reduced-price school meals as “Free” or “Reduced” on the SUN Bucks file. All other students must be reported as “Paid.”

### **Q: How should schools submit data if they have some buildings that are CEP and others that are not?**

A: There is no differentiation in the columns of the student data file for a CEP or non-CEP school. The school will report the data the same way but will not have any students



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qualify via an income application as free or reduced in CEP school data. A student in a CEP school should only ever be qualified for SUN Bucks in a reduced category if the household was determined as DC Medicaid – Reduced in PA-SES. Free students will be only those who are DC or categorically eligible.

**Q: CEP schools do not collect household applications. Can CEP schools use an “economic survey” to determine student eligibility for SUN Bucks since it contains the same information as a household application?**

A: No. CEP schools cannot distribute or accept NSLP (household) applications. Survey data cannot be used for SUN Bucks purposes, even if the school uses it to determine economically disadvantaged households for other purposes. Non-DC households must apply through the DHS SUN Bucks application in order to qualify for SUN Bucks.

**New Q: If a student started the year at a school’s non-CEP site and the family submitted a household meal application, but the student switched to the school’s CEP site, can the school use the student’s eligibility from the application for the SUN Bucks student file?**

A: Yes. The school should first look to see if the student is DC. If the student is not DC, the school may look at the earlier household application in this scenario to see if the child qualifies for free or reduced meals based on income, and report accordingly on the SUN Bucks file. Similarly, if a school has opted into CEP at the half-year mark, and has household applications from students prior to the switch, the student income eligibilities from those applications can be used by the school for SUN Bucks files.

**Q: Will DHS notify families of students who attend CEP schools when the child is not automatically eligible for SUN Bucks and how to apply? We are concerned families will all assume they qualify like with P-EBT.**

A: See the answer to the question: *What best practices should schools follow to inform families about SUN Bucks?*

## Residential Child Care Institution (RCCI) Questions

**Q: Will students in SNP-participating RCCIs be issued SUN Bucks benefits?**

A: Yes.



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### **Q: Where will the SUN Bucks benefits for residential students be sent and what address should RCCIs list for these students?**

A: If the student is on the state's DC file, the benefits will be added to the SNAP or TANF EBT card of the household/entity who claims the student for these benefits. If the student is MA with qualifying income, the benefits will be loaded on a SUN Bucks card and issued to the address on file with DHS.

If the student is not on the state's DC file but the school reported the student as Free or Reduced, DHS will load the benefits on a SUN Bucks card and send it to the address the RCCI reported for the student.

RCCIs can decide what address to use for a student based on the student's or institution's circumstances.

The RCCI may list the RCCI address and distribute the SUN Bucks cards to the students. Or the RCCI may list the student's home address if the student will be home during the projected benefit issuance period (mid-August) and expungement period. Note that benefits are expunged four (4) months after the date of issuance.

## Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Initialisms

AUN – Administrative Unit Number, also known as Agreement Number

CAO – County Assistance Office

CEP – Community Eligibility Provision – refers to a school or group of schools that meet(s) eligibility requirements to offer free breakfast and lunch to each enrolled student.

CN PEARS – Child Nutrition Pennsylvania Electronic Application Reimbursement System

CSC – Center for Schools and Communities

CSIU – Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit

CSV – Comma Separated Value (format of the SUN Bucks file)

DC – Direct Certification or Directly Certified, if referring to student status.



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DHS – Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, which is the issuing agency for SUN Bucks.

LEA – Local Education Agency – licensed educational facility.

MA – Medical Assistance (must have qualifying income)

NSLP – National School Lunch Program

PA-SES – Pennsylvania Student Eligibility System (PrimeroEdge)

Pandemic-EBT or P-EBT – Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer, a program that provided funding for eligible students during the Public Health Emergency, which ended in May 2023.

PDE – Pennsylvania Department of Education, which is the supporting agency

RCCI – Residential Child Care Institution

SBP – School Breakfast Program

SFA – School Food Authority – a school or group of schools that participate(s) in the USDA SNPs

SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

SNP – School Nutrition Programs

Summer EBT or S-EBT – Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer

SUN Bucks – common name for Summer EBT or S-EBT

TANF – Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture