



2026 Frequently Asked Questions for Schools



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Updates to this document will show “New” or “Updated” before the question. The updated text will be italicized

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Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) Benefit Questions

1. What is SUN Bucks?

As part of the 2023 Consolidated Appropriations Act, a bipartisan Congress authorized a permanent program for States, U.S. territories, and certain tribal nations to provide food dollars to low-income families with school-age children to purchase groceries over the summer months.

The program, called Summer-EBT, or “SUN Bucks,” is proven to reduce food insecurity and improve nutrition of children on summer break. It was successfully piloted by USDA in a group of states for several years and through the summer component of Pandemic-EBT. Results demonstrated a 33% decrease in the most severe childhood food insecurity and 2.7-3.9 million children were lifted out of hunger.

The program, which commenced in the summer of 2024, allows participating states, territories, and certain tribal nations to provide \$40 per summer month (\$120 total) per child to families with eligible school-age children for them to buy groceries, like how SNAP benefits are used. SUN Bucks works together with other USDA nutrition programs to connect every eligible child with nutritious food in the summer.

2. What students are eligible for SUN Bucks in 2026?

A child is **automatically** eligible for 2026 SUN Bucks benefits if they:

- Attended an NSLP/SBP-participating school any time during the 2025-2026 school year or summer 2026 (7/1/2025-8/31/2026) and qualified for free or reduced-price meals based on:
 - DC (recipient of SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income), or
 - DC by extension within the household (known as “Sibling Matches” in PA-SES), or
 - Other categorical eligibility (foster, homeless, migrant, runaway, Head Start), or
 - 2025-2026 Free and Reduced Price School Meals application
- Did not attend an NSLP/SBP-participating school during the 2025-2026 school year or summer 2026 but received SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income during that period and was of compulsory age (6-18 years).

Families whose children attended NSLP/SBP-participating schools in the 2025-2026 school year but were not identified as automatically eligible may apply for SUN Bucks. The application is available as an online fillable PDF in both English and Spanish on the DHS SUN Bucks webpage: dhs.pa.gov/sunbucks. Paper applications are also available upon request at the County Assistance Office (CAO).

An “**Eligibility Navigator**” is available on the DHS webpage for families to determine if their children are eligible for SUN Bucks and whether they need to apply.



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3. **Updated** How much will eligible students receive, and when will they receive it?

Each household will receive \$120 per eligible child (the equivalent of \$40 per summer month). DHS will begin issuing the benefits *in late May 2026, starting with children who are automatically eligible by being recipients of SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income. DHS will begin issuing benefits for the remaining automatically eligible students from school data beginning in July 2026.*

SUN Bucks benefits are expunged four (4) months after date of issuance if unused.

4. **New** Will the 2026 SUN Bucks Benefit be issued closer to the beginning of the summer?

Yes, DHS intends to begin issuing 2026 benefits to children who are automatically eligible due to SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid at the beginning of the summer. The benefit process is complex, however, and sometimes timeframes change due to unforeseen circumstances. Families should stay informed about the benefit by visiting the DHS website at dhs.pa.gov/sunbucks.

5. How do families receive SUN Bucks benefits?

DHS will issue the benefit to the family's state EBT card, a previously issued SUN Bucks card, or a new SUN Bucks card depending on how a student is qualified and what cards may be available to the family. It is generally best that schools do not try to answer specific benefit issuance questions from families and instead guide them to contact DHS for such questions. However, there are several things that schools can advise families of regarding issuance of SUN Bucks benefits:

1. Families should save previously issued SUN Bucks cards.
2. DHS follows this overall benefit issuance hierarchy:
 - Benefit is applied to the family's state EBT card if one is available
 - If unavailable, benefit is applied to a previously issued SUN Bucks card
 - If unavailable, benefit is applied to a new SUN Bucks card.

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

6. Who receives the SUN Bucks benefit for a student who is DC by extension?

The primary parent/guardian of the student, as listed on the school's SUN Bucks file submission. In PA-SES these DC students are called "Sibling" DC matches.

DHS applies the benefit to the household's Pennsylvania EBT card account, if they have one. If they do not, the benefit will be applied to the family's previously issued SUN Bucks card if they received one. If neither applies, DHS will load the benefits on a new SUN Bucks card and mail it to the address reported by the school in 2026.



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7. Do all CEP students receive the SUN Bucks benefit?

No. Even though CEP students receive free school meals during the regular school year, they must be DC or categorically eligible to automatically receive the SUN Bucks benefit. Otherwise, the household must apply for SUN Bucks through DHS using the online fillable application available on the DHS SUN Bucks webpage: dhs.pa.gov/sunbucks. Paper applications are also available upon request at the County Assistance Office (CAO).

8. Do Head Start or other pre-K students receive SUN Bucks benefit?

Yes, **if** the Head Start or other pre-K student attends a program that participates in NSLP and/or SBP. Head Start students are categorically eligible for free school meals.

9. Do all eligible students/families need to apply for the SUN Bucks benefit?

No. Most eligible students do **not** need to apply for SUN Bucks. A child is **automatically** eligible for 2026 SUN Bucks benefits and do not need to apply if they:

- Attended an NSLP/SBP-participating school any time during the 2025-2026 school year or summer 2026 (7/1/2025-8/31/2026) and qualified for free or reduced-price meals based on:
 - ✓ Direct Certification (recipient of SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income, or
 - ✓ DC by extension within the household (known as “Sibling Matches” in PA-SES), or
 - ✓ Other categorical eligibility (foster, homeless, migrant, runaway, Head Start), or
 - ✓ 2025-2026 Free and Reduced Price School Meals application
- Did not attend an NSLP/SBP-participating school during the 2025-2026 school year or summer 2026 but received SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income during that period and was of compulsory age (6-18 years).

Families whose children attended NSLP/SBP-participating schools in the 2025-2026 school year but were not identified as automatically eligible may apply for SUN Bucks. The application is available as an online fillable PDF in both English and Spanish on the DHS SUN Bucks webpage: dhs.pa.gov/sunbucks. Paper applications are also available upon request at the County Assistance Office (CAO).

An “**Eligibility Navigator**” is available on the DHS webpage for families to determine if their children are eligible for SUN Bucks and whether they need to apply.

10. How do families apply for the SUN Bucks benefit?

Only families whose children are not automatically eligible for the benefit should apply. To apply for SUN Bucks, families can complete a SUN Bucks application through DHS.

The application is available as an online fillable PDF in both English and Spanish on the DHS SUN Bucks webpage: <https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dhs/resources/summer-ebt.html>. Paper applications are also available upon request at the County Assistance Office (CAO). CAO locations can be found at this webpage: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/services/assistance/pages/cao-contact.aspx>.



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Applications received on or before August 31, 2026, will be considered for the 2026 SUN Bucks benefit. Applications received after August 31, 2026, will be considered for the 2027 SUN Bucks benefit next summer.

11. Can the SUN Bucks application be provided in other languages, like Ukrainian or Russian?

The application is available in English and Spanish currently. This request has been shared with DHS.

12. Can SUN Bucks benefits be used at school to purchase school meals?

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

Role of School Questions

20. Updated What role do schools play for SUN Bucks?

Schools that participate in the NSLP and/or SBP have two main roles for SUN Bucks: 1) student data file submission, and 2) family guidance.

Student Files. All schools that participate in NSLP or SBP must submit a 2026 SUN Bucks student file between *May 26, 2026, and June 19, 2026*. *The student file must include all students who attended schools under the SFA's 2025-2026 School Nutrition Program agreement and who were eligible for NSLP or SBP school meals in any eligibility category (free, reduced, or paid) even if the student was from a different LEA.* It is critical that the data in the school's student file is complete and accurate since it is a primary source DHS uses to determine SUN Bucks benefits for students.

Non-CEP schools are asked to submit a second student file in September. This file must contain any 2025-2026 student who changes meal eligibility from "Paid" to "Free" or "Reduced" due to a household meal application received by the school between the time of their May-June file and 8/31/2026.

Family Guidance – Best Practices. Families often turn to their schools as trusted sources for information. But schools are limited in how much they are able to assist families with SUN Bucks questions. Most detailed family questions must be answered by DHS, the lead SUN Bucks agency in Pennsylvania. However, there are several things PDE and DHS recommend that schools do to inform and assist families with SUN Bucks:

1. Use text, email, and the school's website to provide families with SUN Bucks information.

This could include posting or informing them of the resources listed in item 2. The DHS SUN Bucks webpage includes things such as an "Eligibility Navigator," which allows parents/guardians to determine whether their child is automatically eligible for SUN Bucks or if they need to apply.

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The webpage also has information on how to apply for SUN Bucks and a comprehensive list of family FAQs.

2. Make sure families know of the DHS SUN Bucks resources available to them:

- ✓ DHS SUN Bucks webpage: dhs.pa.gov/sunbucks
- ✓ DHS Statewide Customer Service Center: 877-395-8930, or 215-560-7226 in Philadelphia
- ✓ CAO locator: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/services/assistance/pages/cao-contact.aspx>
- ✓ Summer EBT Income Eligibility Guidelines: <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/resource/sebt-income-eligibility-guidelines>
- ✓ DHS Pre-recorded FAQ line for families: 877-762-1575

3. Provide parents with answers to their most common questions:

- a) *Review the SUN Bucks Family Scenario Guide available to schools, which lists common family inquiries and steps for resolution.*
- b) Students are **automatically** eligible for SUN Bucks and do not need to apply if they:
 - Attended an NSLP/SBP-participating school any time during the 2025-2026 school year or summer 2026 (7/1/2025-8/31/2026) and qualified for free or reduced-price meals based on:
 - ✓ Direct Certification (SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income), or
 - ✓ DC by extension within the household (known as “Sibling Matches” in PA-SES), or
 - ✓ Other categorical eligibility (foster, homeless, migrant, runaway, Head Start), or
 - ✓ 2025-2026 Free and Reduced Price School Meals application
 - Did not attend an NSLP/SBP-participating school during the 2025-2026 school year or summer 2026 but received SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income during that period and were of compulsory age (6-18 years).
- c) Not all CEP students automatically receive SUN Bucks. Only students who are DC matched or live in the same household unit as a DC matched student or are other categorically eligible (foster, homeless, runaway, migrant, Head Start) are automatically eligible for SUN Bucks at CEP schools.
- d) Families whose children are **not** automatically eligible may apply for SUN Bucks using the online fillable PDF application on the DHS SUN Bucks webpage: dhs.pa.gov/sunbucks. Paper applications are also available upon request at the County Assistance Office (CAO).
- e) *DHS will begin issuing the benefits in late May 2026, starting with children who are automatically eligible by being recipients of SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income. DHS will begin issuing benefits for the remaining automatically eligible students from school data beginning in July 2026.*
- f) DHS will issue benefits on the family’s state EBT card first if one is available, otherwise on a previously issued SUN Bucks card if available (*These cards should be retained for future benefits*), otherwise a new SUN Bucks card.
- g) The family must contact DHS for all specific questions about their SUN Bucks benefits.

4. Confirm that the student who the parent/guardian is inquiring about was reported correctly on the school’s 2026 SUN Bucks student file.



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Contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk if there was an error. If no error is found, guide the parent/guardian to the DHS SUN Bucks resources.

21. Updated How many 2026 SUN Bucks student files do schools need to submit and when?

One file for all schools *starting May 26, 2026 through June 19, 2026* and a second file for **non-CEP schools only** in September.

All schools that participate in the NSLP or SBP must submit a 2026 SUN Bucks student file for the 2025-2026 School Year. *The student file must include all students who attended schools under the SFA's 2025-2026 School Nutrition Program agreement and who were eligible for NSLP or SBP school meals in any eligibility category (free, reduced, or paid), including any students from other LEAs.* 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 period for submitting this file is from May 26, 2026 – June 19, 2026.

Non-CEP schools must submit a second student file in early September. This file must only include those 2025-2026 students who changed from “Paid” meal status to “Free” or “Reduced” due to a household meal application received by the school in the time between their May-June file and 8/31/2026.

22. How do schools submit their 2026 SUN Bucks file?

Schools should first prepare their file according to the 2026 SUN Bucks data collection template. This template is emailed to all schools from the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk (sebt@csc.csiu.org) in the Spring but can also be downloaded at <https://www.pasebt.com>, under the *Download 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 with the school's SUN Bucks password, AUN, and user identifying information. 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.

23. Where can schools obtain resources such as the SUN Bucks file template, SUN Bucks webinar for schools (slides and recording), etc.?

At <https://www.pasebt.com> or by contacting the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk.

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

Yes. Full PA-SES users can use a Dynamic Query in PA-SES that is located here: Settings Icon (right top corner)—Administration—Dynamic Queries—Module: Student Eligibility—“Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) Enrollment Data SFA Level-Current School Year”. The query should only be run near the end of the school year (May or after) **but before June 30th**. All results will be as of the date and time the query was run. It is important for the school to check the query results closely for completeness and accuracy prior to submitting the information for SUN Bucks. For example, schools should confirm that the query results contain all students for which the SFA offers and claims meals at all, that all parent/guardian names are present, and that no students who were inactive prior to 2025-2026 are on the report.

25. Should schools include Pre-K students or Head Start students in their SUN Bucks file?

Any child who attended an NSLP- or SBP-participating school and who was eligible for NSLP or SBP school meals in any eligibility category (free, reduced, paid) 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 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.

26. Should fully virtual students be reported on SUN Bucks files?

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 school’s 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.

27. Should schools include home schooled students in their SUN Bucks files?

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 schools 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.

28. Updated Should schools report students who they place out at other educational entities?

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 the student was eligible for NSLP or SBP school meals (in any eligibility category) through the other school.*

If the original sending school *offered* NSLP or SBP meals to the student at any time during the year, they should report the student on their file.

29. Updated How do we handle situations where one school instructs a student and another school offers the student access to NSLP or SBP meals?

Examples of this situation include an IU teaching a class inside a district but the district *is who offers access to NSLP or SBP meals to the students*. Another example is a district that offers NSLP or SBP meals through their own School Nutrition Program to students at an outside educational entity which is not part of their LEA.

In any scenario where a student is eligible for NSLP or SBP school meals (in any eligibility category) through a school's School Nutrition Program, that school must include the student on their SUN Bucks student file, even if the student originates from another LEA. This may require the feeding school to communicate with the teaching school to make sure they have all the information required for the SUN Bucks student file.

30. Do Approved Private Schools need to report their students for SUN Bucks?

Yes, if the school participates in the NSLP or SBP.

31. Should students who withdrew during the school year be included in the SUN Bucks student file? And should graduating seniors be included?

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 during the 2025-2026 school year (which they are required to do for the SUN Bucks program). The complete student record also assists DHS when they help parents/guardians who contact them with benefit questions.

Yes, graduating seniors should be included, like all other enrolled students from the 2025-2026 school year.

32. Where will SUN Bucks benefits for homeless, runaway, migrant, and foster students be sent, and what address should schools list for these students?

In most cases, these students will already be on the state's list of those receiving qualifying state assistance benefits (SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income). In these cases, DHS will load the benefit on the family's state EBT card if one is available. If one is not available, the benefit will be loaded onto the family's previously issued SUN Bucks EBT card. And if that is not available, they will load the benefit onto a new SUN Bucks card and mail it to the address on file with DHS.

If the student is not on the state's list of recipients of state assistance benefits, but the school reported the student as "Free" (since they are categorically eligible for free school meals), DHS will load the benefits on the family's previously issued SUN Bucks EBT card if one was issued, otherwise it will be loaded onto a new SUN Bucks card and be mailed to the address reported by the school.

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 July, or;
- The school's address so that staff may distribute any SUN Bucks cards that are issued to students, 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.html>) 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.

33. What best practices should schools follow to inform families about SUN Bucks?

Refer to the "Family Guidance – Best Practices" section under question #20.

34. How should a school help a family with a DHS denial of benefits question?

The school must inform the family that DHS is the administering agency for SUN Bucks and that the school cannot assist with specific benefit questions like this. 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.

35. How should a school help a family that claims they never received the SUN Bucks benefit even though their child did receive free or reduced meals during the school year?

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 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 corrections 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 the Statewide Customer Service Center at 1-877-395-8930, or 1-215-560-7226 in Philadelphia.

36. How should a school help a family that 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?

If the family is on the state's list of recipients of qualifying state assistance benefits (SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income), 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 address for students who are DC by extension, income eligible from a 2025-2026 Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals, or are eligible due to another category (foster, homeless, runaway, migrant, Head Start). Schools should make sure these addresses are current prior to submitting the SUN Bucks student file in 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.

37. Who should schools contact with questions?

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.

The helpdesk is operated by the CSC division of CSIU. They serve as the SUN Bucks first point of contact for schools. CSIU assists schools with the SUN Bucks data submission process, monitors timely submission of data, assists schools with communicating with families, and researches data inquiries that are requested by the DHS.

Families must **not** contact the CSIU SUN Bucks School Helpdesk with questions, and the goal is that they also do not contact the school with SUN Bucks questions.

Student File Questions

40. Why are schools required to submit student files for SUN Bucks?

The SUN Bucks student data collection is not a mandated process by law, however nearly 100% of schools in PA that participated in NSLP or SBP during the 2024-2025 school year submitted SUN Bucks student files. The data is vital to the DHS SUN Bucks benefit process and they, along with PDE, are grateful to schools for their efforts to submit timely and complete student data.

DHS absorbs school submitted student data into their benefit system and uses it in two primary ways. First, it is used during the benefit determination process to confirm if a child attended an NSLP/SBP participating school (see question 2). Second DHS uses school data to identify additional students who qualify for SUN Bucks because they qualify for free or reduced-price school meals due to: a) a 2025-2026 Application for Free and Reduced-Price School Meals, b) DC by extension within the household unit, or c) Other categorical eligibility (foster, homeless, migrant, runaway, Head Start).

PDE and CSIU are committed to identifying ways to make the process as streamlined as possible for schools. Schools often ask if the SUN Bucks student data can be pulled from PA-SES (PrimerEdge) since they are already required to maintain student and eligibility (DC at minimum) information in that system. PDE and CSIU agree with this goal, but it will require a deep dive into some of the hurdles which would prevent DHS being able to use student data from PA-SES for a student benefit process.

41. Where do we upload our student file and when is it due?

Schools will upload SUN Bucks student files at <https://www.pasebt.com>, “Upload File” link. The window for uploading files is from 5/26/2026-6/19/2026.

42. Can we get an extension past 6/19/2026 to upload our file?

No. DHS has a series of steps in the process to coordinate and issue SUN Bucks benefits. Every step must be accomplished on time to meet the benefit issuance schedule for families.

43. What is our password to upload our SUN Bucks student file – do we create it?

Passwords are emailed to the chief administrator and primary contacts at schools by the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk in the Spring prior to the data collection period.

44. Can the SUN Bucks student report be pulled from PA-SES (PrimerEdge)?

Yes, **but only if** the school is a “full user” of PA-SES with automated and frequent sharing of all student and eligibility data with PA-SES. For these users there is a Dynamic Query called “Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) Enrollment Data SFA Level-CURRENT School Year” available in PA-SES, which creates a properly formatted SUN Bucks student file. The query accessed from a school’s PrimerEdge dashboard under the Settings icon (right top corner)—Administration—Dynamic Queries—Student Eligibility module. This query pulls data as of the date it is run. It must be run prior to June 30th to show data for the current school year. Schools must review the query report for accuracy and completeness prior to using it to upload into the SUN Bucks data validation program.

“DC Only” users of PA-SES generally cannot use the PA-SES query as a SUN Bucks student file since they have less frequent, manual student data sharing with PA-SES and do not keep all student eligibility records in PA-SES (such as Applications for Free and Reduced Price School Meals for non-CEP schools).

45. **New** Many of our student names include diacritics (accents/signs) in the letters. Can we include these in our file?

Yes. *This update was made to the upload program beginning in 2026.*

46. We receive many errors when we try to upload our student file. What do we do?

A detailed list explaining the reasons a file fails the upload process is provided to the user on the upload screen. *The user can also print the error list if desired.* The error can seem more daunting than it really is because errors are listed for every student row, even when the issue is with a whole column. For example, if a school has 1,000 students in their file and did not put required dashes in their AUN numbers, the program will show 1,000 errors for the AUN being incorrect in each student row. Typically, column issues like this can be fixed in minutes which corrects large portions of the errors listed. For this particular example, the school would simply re-key the AUN with dashes in the

first row and copy it down the whole column, making the 1,000 errors go away. Schools can contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk for assistance with any/all upload errors.

47. Updated What does the upload error mean that says the School/Branch IDs in our file don't match the system?

This error means that either the site IDs or the total site count in the school's SUN Bucks file do not match the school's site information under their NSLP agreement in CNPEARS for the current year. Check to make sure all school/branch (site) IDs in the file are the required four digits. For site IDs that are more than four digits in CNPEARS, the last four digits should be used for the student file.

This error also occurs when a school does not include all the sites under their SNP agreement with PDE in their SUN Bucks student file. The school may have neglected to include students in the SUN Bucks file from a site(s) that they offer school meals for but that is not part of their LEA. An example is a private school that has a contract with a district to serve and claim NSLP/SBP meals for their students. Any NSLP/SBP-participating school must include in their SUN Bucks student file *all students who attended schools under the SFA's 2025-2026 School Nutrition Program agreement and who were eligible for NSLP or SBP school meals in any eligibility category (free, reduced, or paid) even if the student was from a different LEA*. It is the responsibility of the NSLP/SBP school to work with the outside site in these situations to obtain all necessary student data to include on their SUN Bucks student file.

48. Updated What does the upload error mean that says our school's total student count is more than 25% different than what is in the system?

The SUN Bucks school data validation system performs a reasonability check on the total number of students reported in the SUN Bucks student file against the total enrollment the school reported separately to PDE in October. This error occurs when the comparison of these two numbers is different by more than 25%. Differences are expected for things such as students who come and go during the school year and for any sites that the school offers and claims meals for that are outside their own LEA. But differences above 25% typically mean that something needs to be rectified in the school's SUN Bucks student file.

When this error occurs, the school should confirm that all students *who were eligible for school meals in any eligibility category (free, reduced, or paid) even if the student was from a different LEA*, are included in their SUN Bucks student file. The school should contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk if the error cannot be rectified after reviewing the file.

49. Updated What does the upload error mean that says our school's total free and reduced student count is more than 25% different than what is in the system?

The SUN Bucks school data validation system performs a reasonability check on the total number of free and reduced students reported in the SUN Bucks student file against the total free and reduced counts the school reported separately to PDE in October. This error occurs when the comparison of these two numbers is different by more than 25%.

When this error occurs, the school should review their SUN Bucks file to confirm that all student meal eligibilities are reported correctly. The school should contact the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk if the error cannot be rectified after reviewing the file.

50. It is too time-consuming to fix all the upload errors caused by spaces and special characters.

DHS requires that student and parent names have no spaces or special characters, other than hyphens and apostrophes which are allowed (except in the first or last position). Commas are not allowed in any field in the student file. These issues can be fixed quickly using the “Find & Select” feature under Home in Excel. For example, a school has 100 errors in the parent last name column due to spaces. They follow this procedure to fix them all at once: highlight the last name column, choose Find & Select, choose Replace, in “Find What” use the spacebar to enter a space, in “Replace With” type a hyphen, then choose Replace All. This replaces all the spaces with hyphens. This feature can be used in any column where it is necessary to remove spaces or special characters.

51. Our AUN column shows dashes in the numbers but the whole column is failing.

This is because the dashes are not in the numbers themselves. The column may have been formatted to display with dashes, but that does not mean the numbers themselves were keyed in with the dashes in them. There is an easy solution for this. Simply re-key the AUN in the first student row with the dashes in it. Then copy and paste that number all the way down the column.

52. How important are case numbers and where can we get them easily?

Case number data for students is very helpful for DHS in the benefit issuance process. Although schools are not required to populate this field in the SUN Bucks student file, schools are strongly encouraged to include it when possible. The case number can be extracted from PA-SES by pulling a Student Eligibility Roster as follows: under the school’s main PrimeroEdge dashboard select Student Eligibility, Eligibility Reports, Eligibility Roster. Leave all default settings but change ‘Report Type’ to detailed. Click ‘Generate Report’ and detail of the school’s full student roster in PA-SES appears, including a Case Number column which can be used to populate the SUN Bucks student file. This roster can be saved at the top as a CSV, Excel, or several other types of files.

Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) School Questions

60. Will all CEP students receive the SUN Bucks benefit in 2026?

No. Even though CEP students receive free school meals during the regular school year, they must be DC or categorically eligible to automatically receive the SUN Bucks benefit. Otherwise, the household must apply for SUN Bucks through DHS using the online fillable PDF application available on the DHS SUN Bucks webpage: dhs.pa.gov/sunbucks. Paper applications are also available upon request at the County Assistance Office (CAO).

61. We are CEP. Should all students be reported as “Free”?

No. CEP schools must report students who are DC or categorically eligible due to foster, homeless, migrant, runaway, or Head Start for free or reduced-price school meals as “Free” or “Reduced” on the SUN Bucks student file. All other students must be reported as “Paid.”

62. How should schools submit data if they have some buildings that are CEP and others that are not?

There is no difference in the columns of the student data file for CEP or non-CEP sites therefore all student data for both types of sites should be put in the same SUN Bucks student file. The only difference between CEP and non-CEP sites is that CEP schools will not have any students who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals based on a 2025-2026 Application for Free and Reduced Price School Meals. The only students CEP schools should report as “Free” or “Reduced” in their SUN Bucks student file are DC students and other categorically eligible students (foster, homeless, runaway, migrant, Head Start). All other students must be reported by CEP schools as “Paid”.

63. Since CEP schools do not collect household applications, can they use an “economic survey” to determine student eligibility for SUN Bucks?

No. CEP schools cannot distribute or accept Applications for Free and Reduced Price School Meals and they cannot use economic survey data for SUN Bucks, 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. An online fillable version of the SUN Bucks application is found on the DHS SUN Bucks webpage: dhs.pa.gov/sunbucks. Paper applications are also available upon request at the County Assistance Office.

64. If a student started the year at a school’s non-CEP site and the family submitted a household meal application there, 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?

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 meal application in this scenario to see if the child qualifies for free or reduced-price meals based on income, and report accordingly on the SUN Bucks student 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 the SUN Bucks file.

65. Will DHS notify families of students who attend CEP schools if the child is not automatically eligible for SUN Bucks and advise them on how to apply?

No, DHS will not contact families of students who are not automatically eligible for SUN Bucks. See the answer to the question: “What best practices should schools follow to inform families about SUN Bucks?”

Residential Child Care Institution (RCCI) Questions

70. Will students in SNP-participating RCCIs be issued SUN Bucks benefits?

Yes.

71. Where will the SUN Bucks benefits for residential students be sent and what address should RCCIs list for these students?

If the student is on the state's list of those who receive qualifying state assistance benefits (SNAP, TANF, or Medicaid with qualifying income), the benefits will be added to the family's state EBT card if one is available. If one is not available, the benefit will be loaded on the family's previously issued SUN Bucks card. And if that is not available, the benefits will be loaded on a new SUN Bucks card and issued to the address on file with DHS.

If the student is not on the state's list of qualifying benefit recipients 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 (early-July) and expungement period. Note that benefits are expunged four (4) months after the date of issuance.

Resource List

SUN Bucks School Helpdesk

- ✓ Mon – Fri, 8am – 4pm
- ✓ Phone: 800-683-5100
- ✓ Email: sebt@csc.csiu.org
- ✓ School support webpage: <https://www.pasebt.com>
 - **School Support Portal** for secure communications with helpdesk
 - *click 'School Support' and use same credentials used to upload student files.*
 - **SUN Bucks Assistant:** Chat assistant that provides answers to common helpdesk questions and finds school materials and resources on the SUN Bucks Helpdesks website related to the topic in question.
 - Student file template and upload link
 - Support resources – FAQs, webinar slides, Family Scenario Guide, SUN Bucks file checklist

For Families

- ✓ DHS SUN Bucks webpage: dhs.pa.gov/sunbucks
 - Eligibility Navigator
 - SUN Bucks Application – English, Spanish
- ✓ DHS Statewide Customer Service Center: 877-395-8930, or 215-560-7226 in Philadelphia
- ✓ CAO locator: <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/services/assistance/pages/cao-contact.aspx>
- ✓ Summer EBT Income Eligibility Guidelines: <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/resource/sebt-income-eligibility-guidelines>
- ✓ DHS Pre-recorded FAQ line for families: 877-762-1575

Acronyms, Abbreviations, and Initialisms

AUN – Administrative Unit Number, also known as Agreement Number

CAO – County Assistance Office

Categorical Eligibility – students that are eligible for free school meals due to inclusion in the special categories of foster, homeless, runaway, migrant, or Head Start

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, operates the SUN Bucks School Helpdesk

CSV UTF-8 – Comma Separated Value (format of the SUN Bucks file)

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

DC-Extended – a student who is eligible for free school meals by virtue of being part of a household (economic unit) which includes a child who is already DC matched

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

LEA – Local Education Agency – licensed educational facility

MA – Medicaid (must have qualifying income)

NSLP – National School Lunch Program

PA-SES – Pennsylvania Student Eligibility System (PrimerEdge)



2026 Frequently Asked Questions for Schools

PDE, BFN – Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Food and Nutrition which is the supporting agency

RCCI – Residential Child Care Institution

SBP – School Breakfast Program

SFA – School Food Authority – the governing body that oversees a school or group of schools and has legal authority to enter into a contract to operate one or more of the USDA School Nutrition Programs (SNPs)

SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

SNPs – a collective term for the federal School Nutrition Program(s), such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP)

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