



HOW TO ENGAGE SCHOOLS IN SUMMER EBT

A resource from the Summer EBT Outreach Playbook

This resource focuses on strategies for engaging schools, but many of these strategies will be relevant for others within the community who are supporting families and connecting them with resources and support. We hope you will apply relevant strategies beyond the specific context of schools.

Messages that raise general awareness and anticipate common points of confusion can proactively provide clarifying information to families on how the program will operate, cutting down on questions directed towards schools and customer service needs.

Support schools with ready-to-use outreach materials so they can easily leverage their existing communication channels.

Schools have established communication channels for sharing information with families (school newsletters, school social media, school websites, flyers sent home, monthly or seasonal in-person events, etc.). Make it simple for them to leverage their existing channels by providing finalized, state-specific outreach materials. Avoid asking or expecting schools to create their own materials, as this adds unnecessary burden and risks inconsistent or incorrect messaging and information. In states whose Summer EBT resources did not adhere to these principles, we heard from school staff who felt a need to create additional resources and explainers to help families access Summer EBT, adding to their workload and causing frustration among schools and families.

Our pilot and survey findings suggest that schools prefer and trust information that comes directly from agencies, and are more confident sharing it with families when it comes from official sources.

Therefore, it is highly encouraged that agencies distribute materials directly, or through a trusted partner if necessary.

In [our template resources](#) you can find customizable resources in the formats most requested and desired by school staff. All of these should be finalized at the agency-level with state-specific information. These include:

- A family-facing flyer (two-sided, with a simple program description and link to an eligibility checker on the front, and answers to families' most common questions on the back). This can be distributed virtually, or printed (just the front, or both sides) for distribution during the school year or at summer meals.
- Social media posts, with suggested timing to leverage the school calendar.
- Language that can be used in a school newsletter, on a school website, or through a school messaging app (i.e. Remind, ClassDojo, ParentSquare, school WhatsApp channels).

Use messages via schools to raise general awareness and anticipate common points of confusion. This can proactively provide clarifying information to families on how the program will operate, cutting down on questions directed towards schools and customer service needs.

Ensure language accessibility. Ensure family-facing resources are available in the most relevant languages for your state, territory or tribe. We plan to offer templates of our NKH resources in English and Spanish, and translations into other languages may be needed in your communities. In general, outreach materials and tools should use plain language and be accessible using strategies described in the [Communicating about Summer EBT](#) section of this playbook.

Identify the key school staff who need Summer EBT information and establish clear methods to distribute it broadly and efficiently.

Based on feedback we received from school staff, it may be useful to ensure basic Summer EBT information is shared with people in a variety of roles. Exact titles vary, but consider the following:

- Front office staff (including year-round employees who may receive questions from families during the summertime)
- Operations and communications staff
- School nutrition staff
- School guidance counselors and social workers
- McKinney Vento Liaisons
- Other family liaisons for specific populations
- Family resource staff roles
- Community school coordinators or managers
- School principals and assistant principals
- Other student services or student support roles not identified above
- Other staff interacting with new, incoming families (i.e. PreK or Kindergarten), who may be unfamiliar with Summer EBT
- Parent Teacher Associations

Identify the key school staff who need Summer EBT information and establish clear methods to distribute it broadly and efficiently, Continued.

Use multiple communication channels to distribute Summer EBT information to school staff in different roles, to maximize agency reach and impact. Start by engaging your main Summer EBT points of contact in schools, and asking them to share resources and training opportunities with other school staff and community members. Whenever possible, leverage formal communication channels within agency departments to efficiently reach specific roles that are connected to schools. If statewide networks or formal channels are limited, partner with state or regional professional associations, which are often eager to share state-specific resources with their members. By diversifying your outreach methods—such as email, newsletters, webinars, and association listservs—you not only ensure consistent messaging but also significantly expand your capacity to reach more family-facing staff quickly and effectively.

Leverage the school calendar, capitalizing on school communication touchpoints that complement Summer EBT operation timelines.

Summer EBT is cyclical, with different moments of the year requiring different actions on the part of families and schools. School-focused Summer EBT communications can align with the academic calendar to build awareness and ensure families take necessary steps when required. Based on feedback from states, districts and families, we encourage the following timeline in the [Summer EBT Guide](#), proposing strategic messages at specific moments (i.e. through [recommended social media posts](#)). For example, schools can promote general Summer EBT awareness in the spring as agencies prepare for benefit issuance; send program reminders before school lets out for summer; cross promote Summer EBT at Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sites; and include the application deadline and benefit expiration reminders in back-to-school communications.

(Dates below are examples and should be customized for your agency.)

 <h3>This Spring</h3> <p>EARLY APRIL</p> <p>Sign up for \$120 in extra grocery support over the summer!</p> <p>Visit [short link] to see if you're automatically enrolled or if you need to apply.</p>	 <h3>End of School Year</h3> <p>MID-MAY</p> <p>When school is out, Summer EBT is in!</p> <p>Summer EBT benefits are loaded onto your existing card or mailed to your address.</p> <p>If you haven't received Summer EBT, you can still apply. Apply at [short link].</p>	 <h3>Over the Summer</h3> <p>JULY</p> <p>Don't miss out on Summer EBT support!</p> <p>If you haven't received Summer EBT yet, there's still time! The deadline to apply is [date].</p>	 <h3>Back to School</h3> <p>MID-AUGUST</p> <p>Are your Summer EBT benefits still on the shelf?</p> <p>Be sure to use them before they expire after 4 months.</p>
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Schools are uniquely positioned to directly reach “need-to-apply” families.

Given program regulations and eligibility criteria, all students who are eligible to apply for Summer EBT must attend a school participating in the National School Lunch or School Breakfast Program. Clearly communicating with “need-to-apply” households is particularly critical for schools operating under Community Eligibility or other special provision programs. Because these schools provide free meals to all students, families do not complete meal applications, meaning children cannot be automatically enrolled (i.e. streamline certified) in Summer EBT through school meal certification. In this context, children that would typically receive free or reduced-price school meals by filling out a school meal application need to apply for Summer EBT in order to receive benefits. This nuance makes schools an essential messenger for this key Summer EBT message: while most eligible families are automatically enrolled, some must apply. Schools play a critical role in helping families determine whether they need to apply and can direct them to the Summer EBT application process.

- School staff are likely to know which students and families may need to apply (eligible but not streamline-certified), and they can ensure these families receive Summer EBT program information through the communications channels these groups most trust and rely on.
- See [Comms in the Context of Free School Meals for All](#) for key messages in CEP settings.
- Forthcoming research from the Urban Institute will describe in greater detail how to identify this population that needs to apply for Summer EBT, and effective strategies for ensuring their access to the program.

Offer support for school staff, including a brief Summer EBT training and a Summer EBT Guide intended for the audience.

- In early spring, consider offering a brief Summer EBT training opportunity open to any interested school staff, with a recording that can be shared. Make sure to include a discussion of anticipated FAQs in your state, based on incoming customer service calls and other persistent issues.
- Coming soon: template slides for a training for school staff and other partners
- Offer a resource for school staff, such as a Summer EBT Guide, including basic program information, a suggested messaging timeline, answers to FAQs, and clear instructions on where to find more information.
 - See a [template Summer EBT Guide for Partners](#)
 - Consider offering the school staff resource in languages other than English. We received many requests for this resource in other languages in Summer 2025.
- Take staff turnover into account. As awareness of and trust in the program grow, ensure key messengers like schools have a chance to understand program basics. Make updated resources available each year.
- Consider offering a communication channel (such as an email address or phone number, or regular office hours) through which school staff can lift up repeated issues or questions directly to the agency. This communication channel can be included as a resource in a [Summer EBT Guide](#) for schools, as appropriate.

Minimize questions directed towards schools.

- Ensure the family-facing agency website for Summer EBT includes clear answers to frequently asked questions, including the most common issues raised via the customer service line, and that there are clear paths identified for additional information or assistance.
- Ensure customer service hotlines, county SNAP offices and any other places likely to receive Summer EBT questions have clear, accurate, consistent information on the program, and that these entities are not directing families back to schools for more information about their individual Summer EBT eligibility status.