

Federal approval announced to assist national school lunch program participants

The Baker-Polito Administration announced that it received federal approval to promote increased food security for families who participate in the United States Department of Agriculture's National School Lunch Program (NSLP) through an initiative called Pandemic EBT, or P-EBT. As of October 2019, more than 500,000 students receive free or reduced-price meals through the NSLP. Families receiving P-EBT will get a payment equal \$5.70 per student per day of school closure through this new initiative, bringing more than \$200 million in federal dollars to the state.

"DTA has been pursuing all available tools and resources to support individuals and families impacted by this public health crisis. In light of school closures, the approval of this collaborative initiative adds another critical tool to the state's effort to leverage federal funds, promote food security, and provide additional food assistance to students and their families. This initiative will also bring close to \$200 million into the Commonwealth's economy, supporting our local grocery stores, corner stores, and their employees," said Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Commissioner Amy Kershaw.

"I'm happy to be working across agencies to get these additional benefits to eligible students' families," Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley said. "This will supplement the great work that districts and other organizations are already doing to provide grab-and-go meals to students, and I know that many families' needs have increased as a result of the pandemic."

P-EBT is administered by DTA and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Funds through the program will be issued in the coming weeks, beginning with households with active Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) cases. Nearly half of the households who will receive assistance are SNAP recipients. DTA and DESE are working with local school districts to provide P-EBT benefits to families who would have received free or reduced-priced meals. More information on when and how benefits will be issued will be shared soon.

The Administration is partnering with Project Bread and the Shah Family Foundation to share information and resources with households who will be receiving P-EBT. Information about P-EBT can be found at: [Mass.gov/p-ebt](https://mass.gov/p-ebt). The Shah Foundation will be setting up a P-EBT page with additional information. For questions about P-EBT or other food access resources, call Project Bread's FoodSource hotline at (800) 645-8333.

"We know we need big solutions to solve a crisis of this size. P-EBT is a great example and we applaud our leaders here in Massachusetts and DTA for taking action so more than 500,000 kids can buy food that will help keep them healthy during the crisis," said Erin McAleer, President of Project Bread

"We are proud to partner with Governor Baker and his administration to support families in accessing healthy food for their children during this challenging time. Every child deserves daily nutritious meals – whether school is in session or not – and we know now more than ever that this is critical to building strong, resilient communities.," said Jill Shah, President of the Shah Family Foundation said.

Since the beginning of this public health crisis, the weekly average number of SNAP applications received has increased by nearly 400%. The Administration remains committed to supporting food security and nutrition for Massachusetts residents. P-EBT builds on DTA and DESE's ongoing efforts to promote food security for families and children who have been

impacted by COVID-19, including:

- Setting up more than 1,500 grab and go meal sites at schools across the Commonwealth
- Issuing emergency SNAP benefits to more than 240,000 households to bring all SNAP recipients to their maximum benefit amount, bringing more than \$40 million into the state
- Streamlining SNAP application processes and extending certification periods
- Pursuing the opportunity to enable SNAP recipients to make online EBT food purchases

DTA assists and empowers low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long term economic self-sufficiency. DTA serves one in nine residents of the Commonwealth with direct economic assistance and food assistance, as well as workforce training opportunities. Learn more: <https://www.mass.gov/DTA/COVID-19>

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is committed to preparing all students for success after high school. The Department's work includes licensing educators, distributing state and federal education money, helping districts implement learning standards, overseeing statewide standardized tests, monitoring schools and districts, and convening districts and individuals to share best practices. In addition, we collect data to inform state and local decisions. Learn more: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/covid19/>.

The Shah Family Foundation supports innovative and transformative work in education, healthcare and the community. We believe that interesting and lasting solutions sit where these intersect. Our primary work and support is centered in Boston, with the goal of sharing broadly the programs and innovations that prove successful in our home town. Learn more at: <https://www.shahfoundation.org/>.

Project Bread is committed to preventing and ending hunger in

Massachusetts. We provide access to food for people who are hungry today while working to break the cycle of hunger through advocacy, education, and community action. Learn more at: ProjectBread.org/