



Parent Voices: Summer EBT

Good for Kids – Good for Communities
Policy Brief • May 2021

2021 LEGISLATIVE OPPORTUNITIES

The [Universal School Meals Program Act of 2021 \(S. 1530, H.R. 3115\)](#) would allow all children in U.S. public schools to receive school meals at no charge, regardless of their family’s income, ensuring that all students get at least two free, healthy meals every school day and giving children a foundation for success in school. [Free School Meals for All Act of 2021 \(SB 364\)](#), is a similar bill introduced in California.

Both bills include a supplemental EBT benefit program for low-income children. The federal bill would provide an EBT benefit of approximately \$60/month per eligible child for groceries during summer when school meals may not be available. CA SB 364’s EBT plan would provide benefits to eligible children over school breaks as well as closures during a state of emergency.

OUR STUDY

During the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers from Stanford University and University of California Nutrition Policy Institute partnered with two community-based organizations in California’s San Joaquin Valley in order to improve access to school meals in this largely rural, low-income region. We investigated barriers and facilitators to healthy school meals in school districts participating in the National School Lunch Program.

We used mixed methods including parent focus groups and structured interviews with district personnel. We also engaged parents in a PhotoVoice project to document meals received over the course of one week. This brief highlights preliminary findings from this work.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Provide a summer EBT option to support good nutrition for children.

Finding: Parents were overwhelmingly grateful for the assistance received through Pandemic-EBT

“The best was the P-EBT cards. Those allowed me to get groceries for my children and I could go on my own time. The card is always readily available and gives me freedom of choice to get food for the rest of the week and provide for my kids. This benefits my family immensely.”

“Luckily, I was able to get it and buy the biggest necessities, especially the milk.”

“Thank you to whoever came up with the idea.”



Research shows:

Children’s access to good nutrition over summer is critical, yet the Summer Food Service Program is underutilized, reaching only 16% of children who receive subsidized meals during the school year.¹ Pandemic-EBT has proven feasible nationwide and is successful in significantly reducing measures of food hardship in families.² A rigorous pilot test of Summer EBT found that it produced large reductions in very low food security among children, and that children receiving benefits consumed more healthful foods.³

References: ¹Fleischhacker S, Turner L, Mande JR. *US Department of Agriculture Summer Meals Program: What’s Hot?* 2020; *Nutrition Today*. 55(3):116-124. ²Bauer L, Pitts A, Ruffini K, Schanzenbach DW. *The effect of Pandemic EBT on measures of food hardship*. Washington, DC: The Hamilton Project, 2020. ³Gordon A, Briefel R, Collins A, Rowe G, Klerman J. Delivering Summer Electronic Benefit Transfers for Children through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children: Benefit Use and Impacts on Food Security and Foods Consumed. 2016; *J Acad Nutr Diet* 117(3).