

▲ OVER 170,600 NEBRASKA CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR ▲ \$53.5 MILLION IN FEDERAL PANDEMIC FOOD ASSISTANCE

Nebraska children in low-income households have lost access to low or no-cost meals due to school closures amidst the COVID-19 public health emergency. At the same time, Nebraskans are facing unprecedented job and income losses that have made it even more difficult for many Nebraska parents to make ends meet.

Congress authorized the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program in the Families First Coronavirus Relief Act (FFCRA) to address the loss of access to food for school children in low-income households.ⁱ The program provides electronic benefits for food assistance to students eligible for free or reduced-price meals for school closures of five consecutive days or more.

In order to participate in P-EBT, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) must submit a proposal as the lead agency to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), working closely with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to identify and communicate with eligible students. Benefits can be retroactive, and each child will be issued \$5.70 per day of school closure.ⁱⁱ In total, P-EBT would help cover the cost of food for 170,596 Nebraska children in low-income households and provide an estimated \$53.5 million in federal funds to be spent in local grocery stores.

POLICY BASICS

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP): SNAP is the nation's most effective antipoverty program, lifting an estimated 17,000 Nebraska children out of poverty annually.ⁱⁱⁱ Families receive benefits in an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) that they can use like a debit card to purchase food, and benefit amounts are calculated on a sliding scale, decreasing as family income increases.^{iv} The program is designed to respond to economic conditions, with states receiving more federal funds as more families become eligible. In hard economic times, SNAP is even more powerful than unemployment insurance—it is estimated that every \$1.00 increase in SNAP benefits generates \$1.73 in economic activity, compared to \$1.64 for unemployment benefits.^v

- Households must have incomes below 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL)
- Benefits are 100% federally funded, and administrative costs are split between federal and state funds
- SNAP helped over 84,000 Nebraska children in 2018^{vi}

CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS: The School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) are the core federal child nutrition programs that serve Nebraska children during the school day. Federal funds account for the majority school meal expenditures—states receive reimbursements for all meals served, with higher rates for meals served to students eligible for free and reduced-price meals.^{vii}

- Children are eligible for free meals if their household income is below 130% of FPL^{viii}
- Children are eligible for reduced-price meals if their household income is below 185% of FPL
- Over 170,596 Nebraska children receive free or reduced-price school meals, or 47.7% of all Nebraska students^{ix}

ELIGIBILITY FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR A FAMILY OF THREE



ELIGIBLE FOR SNAP AND
FREE SCHOOL MEALS

130% of the FPL

\$27,729



ELIGIBLE FOR REDUCED-
PRICE SCHOOL MEALS

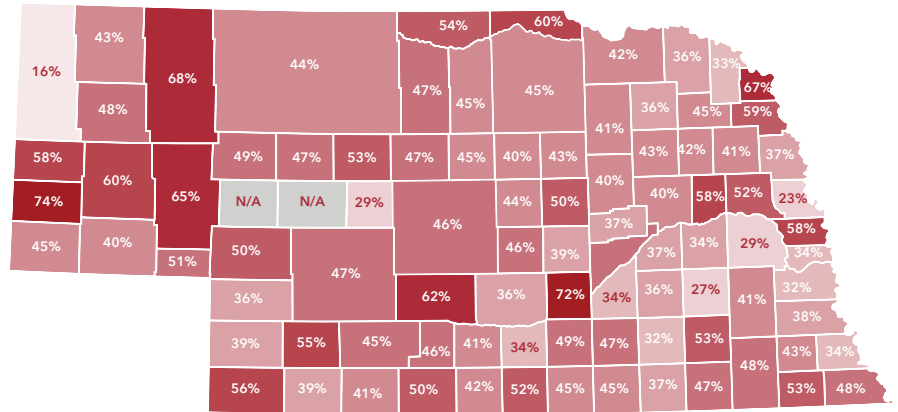
185% of the FPL

\$39,461

PANDEMIC-EBT WOULD PROVIDE FOOD ASSISTANCE TO OVER 170,596 NEBRASKA CHILDREN IN LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

The P-EBT option is a common-sense solution to rising food insecurity in the ongoing public health crisis. Although we don't yet have data about how many children now have unstable access to nutritious food as a result of COVID-19, over 17% of all Nebraska children were food insecure well before the start of the pandemic, and unemployment claims continue to rise.^x The P-EBT program would provide an extra \$114 in food assistance per month to over 170,596 Nebraska children. In total, we estimate that Nebraska communities would see an estimated \$53.5 million in additional federal assistance spent in local grocery stores.^{xi}

PERCENT OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR P-EBT BENEFITS



Eligible children in households that already participate in SNAP will receive an additional benefit amount on their EBT card, while eligible children in a household that does not already participate in SNAP will receive benefits in a new EBT card. Benefits will be 100% federally funded, and states will receive 50% federal reimbursement for administrative costs. Twelve other states, and counting, have already received approval for their P-EBT plans, drawing down millions in federal funds for economic relief that Nebraska kids deserve a share in.^{xiii}

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL P-EBT IMPLEMENTATION

The economic impacts of the pandemic have drastically increased the number of families applying for SNAP benefits, with DHHS reporting a 35% increase in applications from February to March.^{xiii} The addition of P-EBT eligible children may create some additional administrative challenges, since DHHS will need to identify and communicate with a new category of non-SNAP households. The two agencies already engage in regular data-sharing to maximize access to programs for children and reduce administrative burdens on agency and school staff.

A successful P-EBT plan for Nebraska kids must include:

- **SEAMLESS ENROLLMENT OF CHILDREN IN NON-SNAP HOUSEHOLDS.** DHHS should consider creative strategies to gather information on eligible non-SNAP households, including starting with existing case information from other income-tested DHHS programs, such as Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). When existing information is not found, DHHS should not require households to provide more information than is required by the USDA.
- **WIDESPREAD AND MULTILINGUAL INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS.** To ensure that all children who are eligible for P-EBT can access its benefits, DHHS should consider a widespread and multilingual informational campaign in partnership with educational leaders and community partners. Informational materials provided to families should include a clear statement that the use of P-EBT is available to Nebraska children regardless of immigration status, and that the use of P-EBT will not be considered in immigration-related public charge determinations.

NO TIME TO WASTE: NEBRASKA SHOULD SUBMIT A P-EBT PLAN IMMEDIATELY

Millions in federal funds are available through the P-EBT program to immediately help low-income Nebraska families feed their children during the coronavirus pandemic. The program, if offered retroactively to March 16 would bring an estimated \$53.5 million into local grocery stores across Nebraska and help 170,596 Nebraska kids.

TABLE 1. 170,596 NEBRASKA KIDS ELIGIBLE FOR \$53.5 MILLION IN PANDEMIC FOOD ASSISTANCE

COUNTY	Total Enrollment	Total Eligible for P-EBT	%Eligible for P-EBT	Per Day Benefits	Total Benefits, 55 School Days	COUNTY	Total Enrollment	Total Eligible for P-EBT	%Eligible for P-EBT	Per Day Benefits	Total Benefits, 55 School Days
ADAMS	5,578	2,756	49%	\$ 15,709	\$ 864,006	JEFFERSON	1,712	810	47%	\$ 4,617	\$ 253,935
ANTELOPE	977	398	41%	\$ 2,269	\$ 124,773	JOHNSON	708	306	43%	\$ 1,744	\$ 95,931
ARTHUR	*	*	*	*	*	KEARNEY	1,264	435	34%	\$ 2,480	\$ 136,373
BANNER	130	96	74%	\$547	\$ 30,096	KEITH	1,136	569	50%	\$ 3,243	\$ 178,382
BLAINE	45	21	47%	\$120	\$6,584	KEYA PAHA	91	49	54%	\$279	\$ 15,362
BOONE	1,046	416	40%	\$ 2,371	\$ 130,416	KIMBALL	504	228	45%	\$ 1,300	\$ 71,478
Box Butte	2,109	1,009	48%	\$ 5,751	\$ 316,322	KNOX	1,627	688	42%	\$ 3,922	\$ 215,688
BOYD	357	215	60%	\$ 1,226	\$ 67,403	LANCASTER	54,106	22,021	41%	\$ 125,520	\$ 6,903,584
BROWN	427	201	47%	\$ 1,146	\$ 63,014	LINCOLN	5,985	2,806	47%	\$ 15,994	\$ 879,681
BUFFALO	8,998	3,269	36%	\$ 18,633	\$ 1,024,832	LOGAN	204	59	29%	\$336	\$ 18,497
BURT	1,261	463	37%	\$ 2,639	\$ 145,151	LOUP	74	33	45%	\$188	\$ 10,346
BUTLER	1,528	520	34%	\$ 2,964	\$ 163,020	MADISON	7,265	3,134	43%	\$ 17,864	\$ 982,509
CASS	4,225	1,353	32%	\$ 7,712	\$ 424,166	MCPHERSON	*	*	*	*	*
CEDAR	1,673	601	36%	\$ 3,426	\$ 188,414	MERRICK	1,352	634	47%	\$ 3,614	\$ 198,759
CHASE	730	286	39%	\$ 1,630	\$ 89,661	MORRILL	833	502	60%	\$ 2,861	\$ 157,377
CHERRY	780	340	44%	\$ 1,938	\$ 106,590	NANCE	746	277	37%	\$ 1,579	\$ 86,840
CHEYENNE	1,622	650	40%	\$ 3,705	\$ 203,775	NEMAHA	1,384	464	34%	\$ 2,645	\$ 145,464
CLAY	1,134	533	47%	\$ 3,038	\$ 167,096	NUCKOLLS	645	291	45%	\$ 1,659	\$ 91,229
COLFAX	2,694	1,564	58%	\$ 8,915	\$ 490,314	OTOE	2,785	1,047	38%	\$ 5,968	\$ 328,235
CUMING	2,009	817	41%	\$ 4,657	\$ 256,130	PAWNEE	516	274	53%	\$ 1,562	\$ 85,899
CUSTER	1,911	871	46%	\$ 4,965	\$ 273,059	PERKINS	414	151	36%	\$861	\$ 47,339
DAKOTA	4,547	3,032	67%	\$ 17,282	\$ 950,532	PHELPS	1,583	642	41%	\$ 3,659	\$ 201,267
DAWES	1,162	500	43%	\$ 2,850	\$ 156,750	PIERCE	1,244	450	36%	\$ 2,565	\$ 141,075
Dawson	5,519	3,409	62%	\$ 19,431	\$ 1,068,722	PLATTE	6,828	2,751	40%	\$ 15,681	\$ 862,439
DEUEL	391	199	51%	\$ 1,134	\$ 62,387	POLK	1,029	377	37%	\$ 2,149	\$ 118,190
DIXON	628	205	33%	\$ 1,169	\$ 64,268	RED WILLOW	1,839	755	41%	\$ 4,304	\$ 236,693
DODGE	6,918	3,577	52%	\$ 20,389	\$ 1,121,390	RICHARDSON	1,479	708	48%	\$ 4,036	\$ 221,958
DOUGLAS	108,268	62,476	58%	\$ 356,113	\$ 19,586,226	ROCK	248	111	45%	\$633	\$ 34,799
DUNDY	306	171	56%	\$975	\$ 53,609	SALINE	3,332	1,757	53%	\$ 10,015	\$ 550,820
FILLMORE	936	296	32%	\$ 1,687	\$ 92,796	SARPY	35,751	12,312	34%	\$ 70,178	\$ 3,859,812
FRANKLIN	363	187	52%	\$ 1,066	\$ 58,625	SAUNDERS	4,243	1,211	29%	\$ 6,903	\$ 379,649
FRONTIER	559	252	45%	\$ 1,436	\$ 79,002	SCOTTS BLUFF	6,988	4,027	58%	\$ 22,954	\$ 1,262,465
FURNAS	1,026	510	50%	\$ 2,907	\$ 159,885	SEWARD	3,085	820	27%	\$ 4,674	\$ 257,070
GAGE	3,195	1,527	48%	\$ 8,704	\$ 478,715	SHERIDAN	815	555	68%	\$ 3,164	\$ 173,993
GARDEN	260	169	65%	\$963	\$ 52,982	SHERMAN	461	214	46%	\$ 1,220	\$ 67,089
GARFIELD	310	125	40%	\$713	\$ 39,188	SIoux	90	14	16%	\$80	\$ 4,389
GOSPER	209	96	46%	\$547	\$ 30,096	STANTON	631	266	42%	\$ 1,516	\$ 83,391
GRANT	134	65	49%	\$371	\$ 20,378	THAYER	953	355	37%	\$ 2,024	\$ 111,293
GREELEY	487	243	50%	\$ 1,385	\$ 76,181	THOMAS	183	97	53%	\$553	\$ 30,410
HALL	12,558	8,938	71%	\$ 50,947	\$ 2,802,063	THURSTON	627	332	53%	\$ 1,892	\$ 104,082
HAMILTON	1,682	568	34%	\$ 3,238	\$ 178,068	VALLEY	768	338	44%	\$ 1,927	\$ 105,963
HARLAN	344	145	42%	\$827	\$ 45,458	WASHINGTON	3,757	852	23%	\$ 4,856	\$ 267,102
HAYES	123	68	55%	\$388	\$ 21,318	WAYNE	1,744	789	45%	\$ 4,497	\$ 247,352
HITCHCOCK	436	169	39%	\$963	\$ 52,982	WEBSTER	746	335	45%	\$ 1,910	\$ 105,023
HOLT	1,938	881	45%	\$ 5,022	\$ 276,194	WHEELER	105	45	43%	\$257	\$ 14,108
HOOKEr	163	76	47%	\$433	\$ 23,826	YORK	2,421	879	36%	\$ 5,010	\$ 275,567
HOWARD	1,447	563	39%	\$ 3,209	\$ 176,501	TOTAL STATEWIDE	357,444	170,596	48%	\$ 972,397	\$ 53,481,846

* DATA NOT AVAILABLE DUE TO MASKING.

METHODOLOGY

The statewide and county-level estimates of children eligible for P-EBT are based on the free and reduced-price eligible students in SY 2019-20 by school.^{xiv} These numbers were calculated using school-level and district-level data by aggregating schools by the county in which they are located. This data source includes masked data. Due to federal and state privacy laws, NDE masks free and reduced-price data in instances when the information could potentially identify a student (fewer than 10 students or greater than 99% of enrolled students). As a result, these calculated figures are an undercount.

Identifying each school's county: In the Nebraska Department of Education's dataset on the free and reduced-price eligible (FRL) students for the SY2019-20, schools are assigned their district's county. Districts, however, do not perfectly align with county boundaries (e.g. 40 schools are located outside their district's county). To provide accurate county-level data, schools were, instead, assigned a county geospatially (based on the school's physical location).

Calculating number of students eligible for free and reduced priced lunch: Because the school-level data includes smaller samples than the district-level data, it contains more masked data. It is, therefore, preferable to use the district-level data. The following criteria were used to decide which dataset to use to calculate the number of students eligible for free and reduced priced lunch, and therefore for P-EBT, by county:

1. If a school district is entirely contained within one county, then the district-level data was used.
2. If a school district is split between two or more counties AND all the schools in the district have school-level data (no masked data), then the school-level was used and the data was added to each school's respective county.
3. If a school district is split between two or more counties AND the schools in one county have incomplete school-level data (masked data), then a hybrid of the district-level and school-level data was used and the data was added to each school's respective county.

COMMUNITY ELIGIBILITY PROVISION (CEP): The NDE dataset on FRL students for the SY2019-20 identifies schools participating in the federal Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) available to high-poverty schools to provide universal free school meals. All the students in these schools are eligible for P-EBT, even if they are not considered FRL. To avoid double counting, the number of FRL students in each CEP school was subtracted from the school's total enrollment. The difference is then added to each school's respective county.

PROVISION 2: Students enrolled in schools that are participating in the federal Provision 2 option available to high-poverty schools to provide universal free school meals in SY 2018-19.^{xv} Data on Provision 2 schools was not available for the current school year, but it is assumed that participation is similar from the previous year. Like CEP schools, all the students in Provision 2 schools are eligible for P-EBT, even if they are not considered FRL. To avoid double counting, the number of FRL students in each Provision 2 school was subtracted from the school's total enrollment. The difference is then added to each school's respective county.

The **ESTIMATED P-EBT BENEFIT AMOUNT** is based on the \$5.70 daily rate provided by the USDA, our estimates of children eligible for P-EBT statewide and by county, and an estimated 55 school days (from March 16 to May 29). The USDA has provided that states may determine the length of benefit receipt using one of two methods: (1) the average number of canceled school days for the state, or (2) the number of days between the average date of the beginning of school closures and the average date of the end of school closures in the state. For the purposes of this report, we have assumed a start date of March 16, 2020 based on the average school closure date of all schools in Nebraska^{xvi} (where data is available; 68 schools had no data).

CITATIONS

- i. "Guidance for States on Pandemic EBT," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Memorandum, March 20, 2020, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-CN-COVID-PEBTGuidance.pdf>.
- ii. The amount issued is equal to the federal reimbursement to schools for free school breakfast (\$2.20) and lunch (\$3.50). "Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) Questions and Answers," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Memorandum, April 15, 2020, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/SNAP-COVID-PEBTQA.pdf>.
- iii. "Nebraska: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 16, 2020, https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/sn_ap_factsheet_nebraska.pdf.
- iv. Benefit allocations are typically based on household income. During the public health emergency, DHHS is providing Emergency Allotments (EA) to households, which allows families to receive the maximum monthly benefit for two months. Maximum benefit allotments by household size are available at Neb. Admin. Code 475-000-201. "COVID-19: NE Emergency Allotments Approval," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, April, 7, 2020, https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/NE-SNAP-COV-EmergencyAllotments-Approval_0.pdf.
- v. Mark M. Zandi, "Assessing the Macro Economic Impact of Fiscal Stimulus 2008," Moody's Economy.com, January 2008, <https://www.economy.com/mark-zandi/documents/Stimulus-Impact-2008.pdf>.
- vi. Voices for Children in Nebraska, Kids Count in Nebraska 2019 Report, 2020, <https://kidscountnebraska.com/economic-stability/>.
- vii. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Notice, "Administrative Rates," Federal Register 84, no. 54 (March 20, 2019): 10295, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-03-20/pdf/2019-05183.pdf>.
- viii. Additionally, some are categorically eligible for free school meals without regard to income due to participation in other federal programs. Others may be attending schools that offer free school meals to all students under special federal programs for high-poverty schools. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Notice, "Child Nutrition Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines," Federal Register 84, no. 54 (March 20, 2019): 10295, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2019-03-20/pdf/2019-05183.pdf>.
- ix. Voices for Children in Nebraska calculation. See more about this estimate in our Methodology section.
- x. Voices for Children in Nebraska, Kids Count in Nebraska 2019 Report. Matt Olberding, "Nebraska Unemployment Claims Continue to be Elevated," Lincoln Journal Star, April 23, 2020, https://journalstar.com/business/local/nebraska-unemployment-claims-continue-to-be-elevated/article_726b45c8-7e11-5184-942f-ec863759f534.html.
- xi. Voices for Children in Nebraska calculation. See more about this estimate in our Methodology section.
- xii. At the time of publication, Alabama, Arizona, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Carolina, and Rhode Island have received approval and many others are pending approval. "State Guidance on Coronavirus Pandemic EBT (P-EBT)," U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, https://www.fns.usda.gov/sn_ap/state-guidance-coronavirus-pandemic-ebt-pebt.
- xiii. "Gov. Ricketts Takes Action to Enhance Food Security for Nebraskans in Need, Highlights April as Child Abuse Prevention Month," Governor Pete Ricketts Press Release, April 7, 2020, <https://governor.nebraska.gov/press/gov-ricketts-takes-action-enhance-food-security-nebraskans-need-highlights-april-child-abuse>.
- xiv. "2019/20 Free and Reduced Lunch Count by School," Nebraska Department of Education.
- xv. Data downloaded from "Nebraska School Breakfast Report 2018-19," Nebraska Appleseed and Go Big Breakfast, March 2020, <https://neappleseed.org/blog/29917>.
- xvi. "School Covid Status," Nebraska Emergency Management Agency, March 19, 2020, <https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/viewer.html?webmap=4a495de5174b4b368100866d4953a23f>.



WWW.VOICESFORCHILDREN.COM
5217 MAIN ST. STE.103
402-597-3100