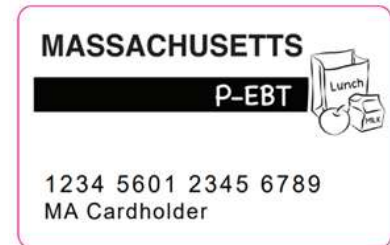


Current P-EBT Advocacy Issues: Four Opportunities for Advocates to Ensure Access to P-EBT Benefits for School-Age Children in MA

March 4, 2021



As of February 25th, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) has issued a total of **358,017 Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) cards** to school age children since last March. These are P-EBT cards issued to families that are not receiving SNAP benefits (families getting SNAP get the P-EBT on their SNAP cards). As school districts notify the state that more students are P-EBT eligible, DTA issues P-EBT cards for these students (if not on SNAP).

DTA reports that 85% of P-EBT cards issued to MA students have been activated. This is great news. However, **roughly 54,600¹ P-EBT cards issued are not “activated” yet**, meaning the family has not set up a PIN number for the card.

The number of P-EBT cards issued by DTA is a “moving target,” especially as school districts identify newly eligible students or students inadvertently left off earlier lists. However, some of these P-EBT cards were issued months ago but remain idle, including:

- Families who never got a P-EBT card because it was sent to the wrong address; or families who moved without updating their address with the school.
- Families (particularly those with limited English proficiency, limited literacy, or other barriers) confused about how to activate the card by setting up a PIN.
- Families not familiar with P-EBT who are reluctant to use the P-EBT cards.

In addition, families may not be using P-EBT because they have lost or thrown away their cards, are concerned about public charge, and other factors. Meanwhile, other families may be eligible for P-EBT but have not gotten it because they have not been put on key lists to qualify their children for these benefits. Our goal is to dial up the outreach and advocacy to ensure every eligible child and family gets and uses P-EBT benefits.

This document highlights four P-EBT issues and offers related action steps advocates can take to improve access to and utilization of P-EBT in their communities.² The Appendices include resources to support advocates, such as sample communication templates and newsletters from DESE.

¹ [Here](#) is a google doc with the DTA data for un-pinned cards by school district as of 2/25/2021, shared with MLRI as of 3/3/2021.

² While this memo refers to “families” receiving P-EBT throughout, unaccompanied minors and independent students who qualify for P-EBT have the same rights and options as families receiving P-EBT. P-EBT cards are issued in the student’s name and can be used by a student directly or by a caregiver.

Issue 1: “Unpinned” P-EBT Cards means Food Benefits are not Reaching Families.

On Friday 2/5/21, the Department of Early and Secondary Education (DESE) shared P-EBT data with all local school districts. Districts now have the names of their students who were issued a P-EBT card but had not activated it as of that date. Schools will receive updated lists from DESE regularly. This student-specific information cannot be shared with community organizations, but schools can directly reach out to these families to encourage them to set up a PIN for their P-EBT card.

Action Step: Urge local school districts to do outreach to families on their list of unpinned P-EBT cards.

Encourage your school district to use the unpinned card data to do individual outreach to families who have not yet activated their P-EBT cards. This can be through emails, text messages and phone calls, or letters sent home by mail.³

Individual outreach is especially important for students and families who may have more difficulty accessing or activating their cards, including:

- Students experiencing homelessness,
- Unaccompanied minors,
- Families who speak a language other than English,
- Immigrant families,
- Foster youth/parents,
- Students with disabilities, and/or who have guardians with disabilities

In messaging to immigrant families, we recommend schools include language that clearly states that P-EBT does not count for “public charge” and does not affect any family member’s immigration status. See the state’s [webpage](#) which explains that P-EBT benefits do not count under the immigration public charge rules.

Here is the [full list of the number of unpinned P-EBT cards by school district](#) as of 2/25/21. See [Appendix A](#) for a list of school districts with high numbers of unpinned cards.

³ Note that many low-income families have had to move due to eviction/threat of eviction since the end of the statewide moratorium in October 2020. Phone or email outreach may be more effective than letters sent by mail to reach those who have moved.

Issue 2: P-EBT Utilization May be Lower in Newer CEP Schools.

The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) allows districts that serve a large proportion of low-income students to serve universal free breakfast and lunch to all students. As long as remote or hybrid⁴ learning continues due to COVID, all students in CEP districts are eligible for full or partial P-EBT benefits, regardless of family income. Some families may feel they do not need P-EBT but not realize there are ways they can use their P-EBT help neighbors.⁵

The full list of both individual schools and school districts in MA that adopted CEP *for the first time* in September 2020 (for School Year 20/21) is available [here](#). School districts that newly adopted CEP district-wide are Malden, Marlborough, and Revere. See [Appendix B](#) for more information and data on P-EBT card activation for new CEP districts and schools.

Many families in these schools may not have received P-EBT benefits last spring unless they qualified for free or reduced price meals in School Year 19/20. Since the start of School Year 20/21, students enrolled at new CEP schools who did not get P-EBT last spring should have received DTA letters about P-EBT and their P-EBT cards.

Action Step: Work with new CEP school districts and individual CEP schools to promote use of P-EBT benefits.

Community advocates working in new CEP districts can urge their school districts to affirmatively communicate with families about how to PIN and use their P-EBT benefits. P-EBT outreach materials - including flyers and social media graphic for CEP schools in 10 different languages – are available at MAp-EBT.org/outreach-materials.

Here are some strategies you can recommend to schools:

- Send a robocall, email or text message to parents using the templates provided on MAp-EBT.org
- Post on social media - graphics and sample text are provided on MAp-EBT.org
- Share the P-EBT 1 page flyer digitally and/or print and distribute at school meal sites ([English](#) and [Spanish](#), other languages available at MAp-EBT.org)
- Post about P-EBT on school websites
- Engage the school's parent information center if relevant
- Work with the McKinney-Vento Liaisons to connect with students experiencing homelessness to see if they need food support or help accessing P-EBT
- Include messaging that using P-EBT does NOT impact a student or parent's immigration status in any way and does not count for public charge. See the [EOHHS guidance on public charge](#) for more information.

See example P-EBT outreach materials in [Appendix C](#) and a template communication to CEP schools in [Appendix D](#).

⁴ Students in a hybrid model with meal service included – for example, at school in the morning and remote in the afternoons – are not eligible for P-EBT.

⁵ [This MLRI flyer](#) lists ways families can use their P-EBT benefits to support their neighbors.

Issue 3: NSLP applications are needed for P-EBT access in non-CEP schools.

Families who are not eligible for SNAP, or do not want to apply for SNAP, need to apply for free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) at their local school to qualify for P-EBT benefits.⁶ This is true for families that live in non-CEP school districts and who were not getting free/reduced-price meals during the School Year 19/20.⁷

With schools closed and grab-and-go meal sites open to all families, it may not be intuitive to families that they should apply for free/reduced price meals to then qualify for P-EBT. Further, schools may not be affirmatively telling families about the NSLP application process or may not be processing NSLP applications in a timely manner.⁸

Action Step: Ensure non-CEP districts are promoting Free/Reduced Price Meal Applications as a way to access P-EBT.

First, encourage families to apply to SNAP. Families who get SNAP automatically get P-EBT if students are learning fully remotely or in certain hybrid models. Families can easily apply online at DTAConnect.com, by calling the DTA Assistance line at 1-877-382-2363 (press #6) or the Project Bread FoodSource Hotline at 1-800-645-8333. Paper applications are available at Mass.gov/SNAP.



Second, reach out to remote and hybrid school districts to make sure they are still promoting and processing NSLP applications. Encourage them to actively reach out to families to remind them that they can apply for SNAP and/or NSLP at any time. It is critical that school districts make the connection between SNAP and/or NSLP and receiving P-EBT. This is especially important for families who are facing economic hardship during COVID and may be newly eligible for NSLP in during the current school year.

See [Appendix E](#) for a DESE communication outlining schools' roles in ensuring that eligible families receive P-EBT.

⁶ Families need to apply for the NSLP unless they qualify for free school meals via direct certification – for example, because they are receiving SNAP or TAFDC - or in some situations, MassHealth. Learn more [here](#).

⁷ Families who were receiving free/reduced price meals in the School Year 19/20 should NOT have to reapply to qualify for NSLP in the School Year 20/21 because schools should be using 2019-2020 NSLP information to determine eligibility for the 2020-2021 program and P-EBT.

⁸The "Directors Ask, DESE answers" section of the [January 2021 DESE MIC Newsletter](#) clarifies to school nutrition personnel that: "If your district would normally distribute household applications, you're highly encouraged to continue to process and approve these applications regardless of participating under NSLP, SSO or SFSP for SY20-21. Direct certification and school meal applications are important for the purpose of catching newly eligible students for P-EBT benefit issuance."

Issue 4: Some Eligible Families are Receiving Incorrect P-EBT Benefit Amounts.

Families may receive incorrect benefit amounts, or may have never received a P-EBT card. This can be for a number of reasons, including the family/student:

- Moved without updating their address with their school.
- Moved school districts and missed benefits because neither district included the student on their list to DTA.
- Is incorrectly coded as being in a hybrid vs. remote learning model.
- Switched learning models during the month, but the school district did not include the correct learning model when sharing information with DESE.⁹

Action Step: Help families receive the correct amount of P-EBT benefits for which their children qualify.

Help families check their P-EBT balance to determine if their P-EBT was issued and if they received the correct benefit amount by:

- **Families issued P-EBT cards:** Visit DTAConnect.com/PEBT, go to “Pandemic EBT Case and Account Balance Information” and follow instructions. The family can also call the DTA Assistance Line at 1-877-382-2363 to confirm what their P-EBT payments were each month.
- **Families getting P-EBT on their SNAP EBT Cards:** P-EBT benefits are part of the total SNAP balance and are separately identified. Families can check how much they got in P-EBT benefits by checking their History of Benefits on DTAConnect.com to look at when different payments were uploaded. Starting in January 2021, P-EBT benefits will be uploaded on the 25th of the month.

Note: Families who first got their P-EBT benefits on a SNAP EBT Card will continue to get P-EBT benefits on that SNAP EBT Card, even if they are no longer receiving DTA benefits. Those families can reapply for SNAP!

⁹ In an email communication that the DESE Data Collection Unit sent to the Student Information Management Systems (SIMS) contacts in each district in December 2020, DESE advised the following to local SIMS in an FAQ: “student should be classified using the instruction mode they were in for the majority of the month.” Contact the DESE Data Collection Unit to confirm this information.

Troubleshooting Specific Circumstances of Inaccurate Benefit Amounts

A. Family moved and never got their physical P-EBT Card:

Families who have moved but did not report their new address may have never received a card if it was sent to an outdated address. If a student who is not receiving SNAP or TAFDC never received a P-EBT card, they can request a new card by either:

- Using the online portal at: DTAConnect.com/PEBT, under “P-EBT Card Replacement Request,” or
- Calling the DTA Assistance Line to ask for a card (press #6): 1-877-382-2363.

B. Family did not receive benefits after changing school districts

Families who move between school districts may be incorrectly excluded from the lists that school districts send to DESE. Schools are expected to send data to DESE by the 10th of the month following the month for which benefits are being issued retroactively, leading to a potential lag between when students are enrolled and when their information is reported to DTA. For families that move, in general, DESE has been clear that schools should include all children who were enrolled and eligible for at least part of the prior month.¹⁰

Example: Jane is learning remotely at Revere for the month of January. In early February, her family moves to Barnstable where she is enrolled to learn remotely. Revere sends a list to DESE for January P-EBT benefits on February 9th. Revere should have included Jane on their list for January benefits. Barnstable is not responsible because Jane was not attending school in Barnstable in January.

If you notice a family misses out on benefits due to this issue, reach out to the school district(s) they were enrolled in for that benefit month to include them on the list.

C. Family received no Benefit/Incorrect Benefit Amount:

Families who received incorrect benefits should check with their schools on how they were coded by the school when their information was sent to DESE. For example, if a student was learning remotely but only received benefits for hybrid learners, they should ask their school to correct how they were coded by their school. The missed P-EBT amount should be issued retroactively once the issue is resolved. If the family cannot resolve the problem with the school, contact the DTA Ombudsman office at 617-348-5354.

See [Appendix F](#) for a flowchart outlining how to troubleshoot individual P-EBT cases.

¹⁰ In an email communication that the DESE Data Collection Unit sent to the Student Information Management Systems (SIMS) contacts in each district in December 2020, DESE advised the following to local SIMS in an FAQ: “If the student was enrolled and eligible for part of the month, include the student in the file for that month. Students who exited would then be removed from the file starting in the following month’s collection.” Contact the DESE Data Collection Unit to confirm this information.

For More Information, Visit:

- MAp-EBT.org
- Mass.gov/P-EBT

If you have further questions, contact:

Aparna Raghu
AmeriCorps Legal Advocate, Mass Law Reform Institute
araghu@mlri.org

Appendices

Appendix A: List of School Districts with High Numbers of Unpinned Cards

The full list of P-EBT pinned card data by school district as of 2/25/21 is available [here](#).

City/Town	Number of Cards Issued 2/25/21	Number of Cards Pinned 2/25/21	Number of Cards Unpinned 2/25/21	% of cards Pinned 2/25/21	% of cards Unpinned 2/25/21
BROCKTON	12252	11076	1176	90.40%	9.60%
EVERETT	7276	6402	874	87.99%	12.01%
FALL RIVER	8040	6831	1209	84.96%	15.04%
FRAMINGHAM	5409	4566	843	84.41%	15.59%
HAVERHILL	5433	4708	725	86.66%	13.34%
LAWRENCE	9807	8949	858	91.25%	8.75%
LOWELL	12818	11191	1627	87.31%	12.69%
LYNN	13467	12246	1221	90.93%	9.07%
MALDEN	5834	4653	1181	79.76%	20.24%
MARLBOROUGH	4678	3655	1023	78.13%	21.87%
NEW BEDFORD	9523	8465	1058	88.89%	11.11%
QUINCY	6638	5087	1551	76.63%	23.37%
REVERE	6576	5840	736	88.81%	11.19%
SPRINGFIELD	14231	12679	1552	89.09%	10.91%
TAUNTON	5135	4417	718	86.02%	13.98%
WALTHAM	3519	2979	540	84.65%	15.35%
WINTHROP	1573	1003	570	63.76%	36.24%
WORCESTER	18333	16520	1813	90.11%	9.89%

Appendix B: P-EBT Activation in New CEP Districts

- Newly adopting CEP district-wide include: **Malden, Marlborough, and Revere.**
As of 2/25/21, the data for number of P-EBT cards pinned is as follows:

City/Town	Issued	Pinned	Unpinned	% Pinned	% Unpinned
MALDEN	5834	4653	1181	79.76%	20.24%
MARLBOROUGH	4678	3655	1023	78.13%	21.87%
REVERE	6576	5840	736	88.81%	11.19%

- Public school districts with one or more new CEP schools (not district-wide):
Pittsfield, Taunton, Greenfield, Westfield, Framingham, and Spencer.
- A number of **charter schools** also adopted CEP (see [list](#))

Appendix C: Sample P-EBT Outreach Materials

A number of school districts including the Boston Public Schools (BPS) have done a fantastic job reaching out to families, both through email and text messages, and by promoting the MAp-EBT.org website. Here are some examples:

- Boston Public Schools:
 - Examples of BPS social media posts about P-EBT on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
- A media example from the [Revere Journal on 1/27/21](#) announcing P-EBT to all Revere Public School Students.
- A Malden [Superintendent's communication on 12/31/21](#) from Malden.

Example Social Media Graphics from MAp-EBT.org/Outreach-Materials



Example P-EBT Phone Outreach from Boston Public Schools

This is an example of text from an automated phone that Boston Public Schools, a CEP district, sent to families regarding P-EBT in the 2020-2021 school year.

From: Boston Public Schools <communications@bostonpublicschools.org>
Date: January 12, 2021 at 5:39:53 PM EST
To: Ross.wilson76@gmail.com
Subject: Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) Funds for 2020-21 School Year
Reply-To: Communications@bostonpublicschools.org

Communications Office

Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building
2300 Washington Street, 5th Floor
Roxbury, Massachusetts 02119

The following is the text of an automated phone call sent today:

Greetings BPS Families.

We are calling with an update on Pandemic EBT funds.

Every BPS student is eligible to receive financial assistance for food due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These funds are available under the Pandemic EBT (Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer) or P-EBT program. Students already received P-EBT funds for the 2019-20 school year.

Last week, BPS students began receiving additional P-EBT funds for the 2020-2021 school year. If you received P-EBT in the past, you received funds at the end of December to cover October and November school days. For the rest of the school year, funds for the preceding month will be available on the 25th of every month. Check your P-EBT or EBT card by calling the number on the back of the card.

If you are new to P-EBT, look for a letter in the mail this month, or check the EBT card you already have for funds. If you no longer have your P-EBT card, please visit dtaconnect.com/pebt to request a new one.

For more information on the P-EBT program and food assistance, please visit www.MAp-EBT.org or call the DTA Assistance Line at 877-382-2363.

Thank you for your time. Please stay safe and healthy.

Boston Public Schools
Dr. Brenda Cassellius,
Superintendent

Boston School
Committee
Alexandra Oliver-Dávila,
Chair

City of Boston
Martin J. Walsh, Mayor



Appendix D: Sample Communication to New CEP Schools

The following was sent to new CEP districts from the Shah Foundation – feel free to modify this template for your use.

Dear Principal / Superintendent TBD,

I hope this email finds you well. Since April, the Shah Family Foundation has supported the Department of Transitional Assistance with outreach for the [Pandemic EBT \(P-EBT\) Program](#), including extensive work with schools and community partners across the Commonwealth.

We know how critical the P-EBT program is in helping students and families buy food during this crisis. Our goal is to provide support and best practices for organizations to help them best communicate about P-EBT.

We know that your school is new to CEP and therefore you may have students who are new to the Pandemic EBT program. I wanted to share some information and resources with you that may be helpful in communicating to families.

P-EBT outreach materials for CEP schools are available for download in 10 different languages at www.MAp-EBT.org/outreach-materials. Here are the most effective ways we've seen schools communicate about P-EBT:

- Send a [robo text](#) using the templates provided online
- Send a [robo call](#) using the templates provided online
- Post on [social media](#) - graphics and sample text is provided
- Share the [P-EBT 1 page flyer](#) digitally and/or print and distribute at school meal sites
- Post about P-EBT on your school website
- Distribute information to your staff. Engage your parent information center if relevant and student / family advocates
- Reach out to your students who are experiencing homelessness to see if they need support

The www.MAp-EBT.org website has additional information for students and families (translation to 6 languages is available on the bottom right hand corner), including [FAQs](#). We know that some individuals may have difficulty in activating (pinning) the card; for this reason, we have created [flyers for download](#) in 10 languages. There are also [videos with step-by-step instructions](#) that you can share.

I've attached some recent examples from other schools/ districts for your reference.

Thank you and let me know if you have any questions. I am happy to help assist you in getting the word out to your students about this important program.

Best Regards,

***Attach or copy / paste school examples below **

Brockton Public Schools
January 9 at 1:15 PM

Attention BPS families! Check your P-EBT cards- new funds for October and November were issued at the end of last month. If you have any questions, please email Justice Johnson-Purrier at justicejohnsonpurrier@bpsms.org

Check your card! Funds for October & November will be issued at the end of December. Please let P-EBT check your card! card to check your card is coming.

Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) for the 2020-2021 School Year
Additional Food Funds for Students Requiring Specialized Services

How much will I get?

<p>How much will I get?</p> <p>For students with a valid P-EBT card: - \$100 per month for students in grades K-5 - \$150 per month for students in grades 6-12</p>	<p>For students with a valid P-EBT card: - \$100 per month for students in grades K-5 - \$150 per month for students in grades 6-12</p>
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How & when will I get the funds?

Check your EBT card for the end of each month. Funds will be credited to your card by the 15th of each month.

What can I buy?

At the end of each month, you will receive a new P-EBT card. You can use this card to buy groceries at participating retailers. Funds will be credited to your card by the 15th of each month.

Need More Food Help?

For more information on the P-EBT program and food assistance, please visit www.MAP-EBT.org or call the DTA Assistance Line at 877-382-2363.



The following is the text of an automated phone call sent today:

Greetings BPS Families,

We are calling with an update on Pandemic EBT funds.

Every BPS student is eligible to receive financial assistance for food due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These funds are available under the Pandemic EBT (Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer) or P-EBT program. Students already received P-EBT funds for the 2019-20 school year.

Last week, BPS students began receiving additional P-EBT funds for the 2020-2021 school year. If you received P-EBT in the past, you received funds at the end of December to cover October and November school days. For the rest of the school year, funds for the preceding month will be available on the 15th of every month. Check your P-EBT or EBT card by calling the number on the back of the card.

If you are new to P-EBT, look for a letter in the mail this month, or check the EBT card you already have for funds. If you no longer have your P-EBT card, please visit www.MAP-EBT.org to request a new one.

For more information on the P-EBT program and food assistance, please visit www.MAP-EBT.org or call the DTA Assistance Line at 877-382-2363.

Thank you for your time. Please stay safe and healthy.

Brockton Public Schools
 1000 International Building
 Brockton, MA 01910
 Brockton, MA 01910
 Brockton, MA 01910

Wednesday 9:39 AM

BPS (1/2): All BPS students will receive P-EBT benefits starting Wednesday, December 30. Check your EBT or P-EBT card for funds. More info: www.MAP-EBT.org

BPS (2/2): If you are new to P-EBT, check your mail in January or check the EBT card you already have for funds. Call the DTA Assistance Line at [877-382-2363](tel:877-382-2363)

Today 9:24 AM

Text Message

Appendix E: Communication from DESE Commissioner Riley Regarding Schools' Role in Ensuring Eligible Families Receive P-EBT

[This newsletter](#) from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), sent on 2/1/21, outlines Schools' Roles in Ensuring Eligible Families Receive P-EBT under point 7.

"7. Schools' Role in Ensuring Eligible Families Receive P-EBT:

The Department would like to thank districts for their hard work and attention to P-EBT food benefits and ask for their continuing help to make it a success. P-EBT is a joint effort between the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), DESE, and individual school districts. Success depends on all three to ensure eligible families receive this benefit and to ensure families' questions are answered. While DTA is the point of contact for questions about P-EBT cards, including timing of issuance, *schools should be prepared to answer questions around student eligibility, timing of eligibility certification, and students' hybrid or remote status.*

Common family P-EBT questions can be answered using this [information](#) and [FAQ](#) from www.map-ebt.org. Families inquiring about P-EBT cards (lost card, card pinning, card issues), timing of funds issuance, etc. can be directed to www.map-ebt.org (which is available in six languages) or the DTA Assistance Line at 1-877-382-2363.

P-EBT benefits are paid out on the 25th of each month. On that day, benefits will be loaded to the account of families who have an existing card. Families new to P-EBT who do not yet have a card will receive one in the mail sometime after the 25th (allow for up to two weeks for mailing), unless they receive DTA benefits (SNAP, TAFDC). Those newly eligible households will receive P-EBT on their DTA EBT card.

The following school district roles are key for P-EBT success:

School Nutrition Staff:

- Regularly determine and confirm students' eligibility for free and reduced price meals by running Direct Certification at least monthly and processing and approving free and reduced price household applications (if not a Community Eligibility Provision school) in a timely manner.

District SIMS Contacts:

- **Send lists** of P-EBT-eligible students to DESE **by the 10th of each month** so that students can be included in the benefits issuance on the 25th of the same month.

- Student records that come in **after the 10th** will be accepted, **but** they will be included in the **following month's issuance**.
- Ensure that the most up-to-date data on students' free/reduced eligibility and instruction mode is used each month so that students receive the proper amount of P-EBT funds.

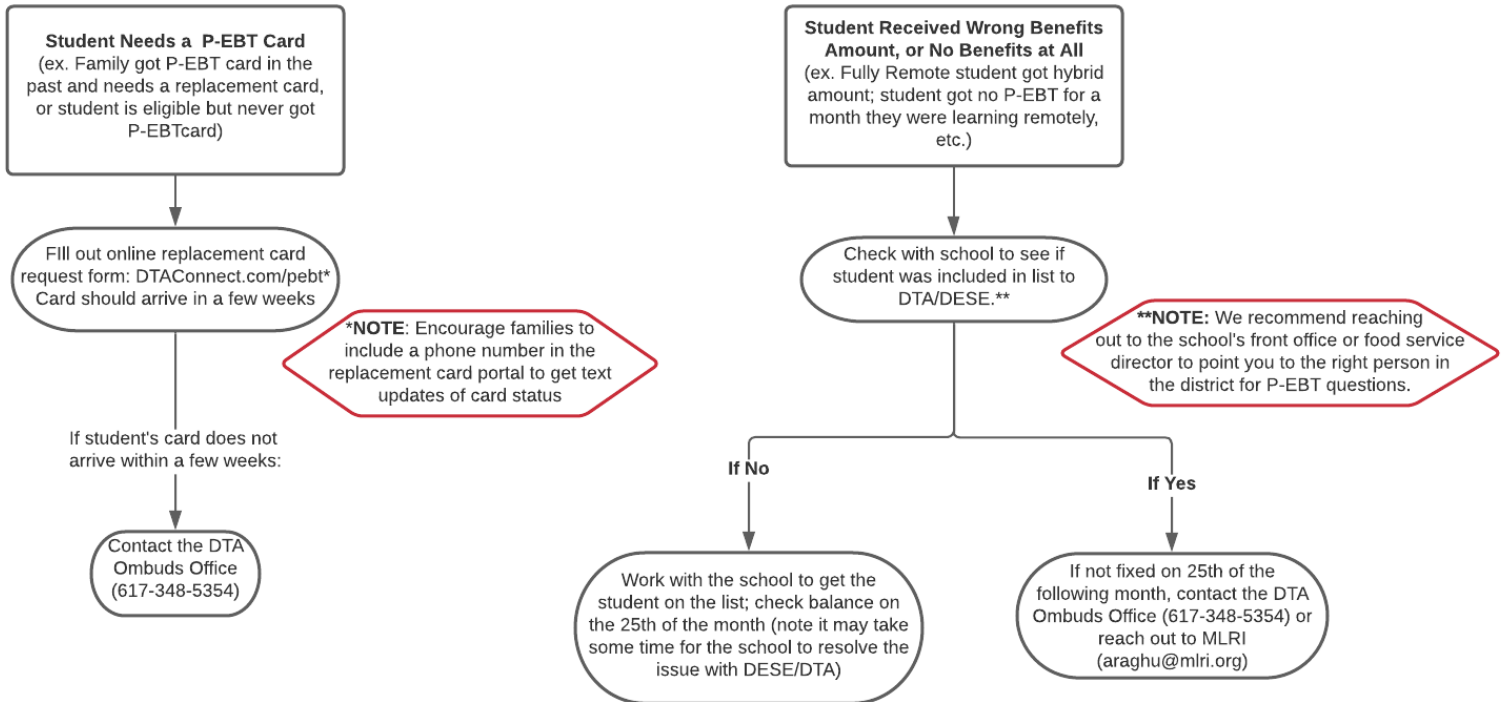
School District/School Administrators:

- Send important information to all households to ensure they **know about P-EBT, how to apply for the program** if they have not already (through applying for SNAP or completing a free/reduced application), and **where to direct their questions**.

Critical resources to send out to households include: [flyers and social media resources](#) (available in up to 10 languages) and email, robocall and text message templates for Community Eligibility Provision and non-Community Eligibility Provision schools. Other resources for families who may need more food assistance include www.projectbread.org/get-help and Project Bread's FoodSource Hotline (800-645-8333)."

Appendix F: Flowchart Outlining Steps for Troubleshooting Individual P-EBT Cases

I am working with an eligible student who did not get P-EBT. What do I do?



P-EBT benefits are issued the following month – so the issuance amount is connected to the student’s learning model for the prior month. Visit MAp-EBT.org to learn more.

