



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

May 12, 2021

Dear school or district leader:

Thank you for your tireless efforts to deploy creative solutions to keep our students connected and learning while at home over the past year—we are lucky to have you on the front lines.

I am writing to share information about a new, temporary federal program to help eligible families pay for internet service during the pandemic. If you have students whose families are struggling to afford their monthly internet service, the Federal Communications Commission's **Emergency Broadband Benefit Program** (EBB Program) may be able to help. Households with a child who is approved to receive free or reduced price meals under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the School Breakfast Program (SBP), including children who attend schools participating in U.S. Department of Agriculture's Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), are eligible for the EBB Program. I encourage you to review the enclosed frequently asked questions (FAQs) and spread the word in multiple languages and accessible communication channels to your eligible families.

As our students return to school buildings and we move from pandemic response to recovery, technology will be essential for meeting the needs of diverse learners, supporting teachers, and providing school and district leaders with flexible models to support learning. It is important that we remain focused on addressing the digital divide for students in order to build our education system back better than it was before the pandemic. Reliable home internet access is also critical for helping our students' families recover—including providing access to online workforce development resources, job skills training, and telehealth services.

As trusted community members, schools and districts are well-positioned to share information about this important program. In addition to conducting any EBB Program outreach to eligible families, schools and districts can take steps to help families navigate the sign-up process. Along with the FAQs, enclosed you will find strategies for school and district outreach and adaptable, accessible outreach materials. The enclosed materials are also available on our website at <https://tech.ed.gov/broadband/ebb/>.

Thank you for helping us spread the word and keep students and families connected and learning.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christopher Rush".

Christopher Rush
Senior Advisor for Innovation & Educational Technology
Office of the Secretary
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EBB Program Frequently Asked Questions for Schools and Districts

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A. About the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB Program)

A-1. What is the EBB Program and how will it help my students?

The Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC’s) EBB Program is a temporary federal program to help eligible households pay for internet service during the pandemic. If you have students whose families are struggling to afford their monthly internet service, this program may be able to help. The Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) administers the EBB Program under the direction of the FCC. Visit [GetEmergencyBroadband.org](https://www.usac.org/lifeline/get-started/enhanced-tribal-benefit/#Eligible) for more information.

A-2. What does the EBB Program discount cover?

The EBB Program provides a monthly discount of not more than \$50 per month on broadband service and associated equipment (for example, a modem) for eligible households and not more than \$75 per month for households on qualifying [Tribal lands](#).¹ If the participating consumer chooses an eligible plan that costs \$50/month or less, the consumer will receive that service for free, at least until the EBB Program ends.

Each participating household may also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 for one connected device—a laptop, desktop, or tablet computer—where available from a participating broadband provider, as long as the household contributes more than \$10 and less than \$50 towards the cost of the device. Each participating household is limited to a single device discount.

School Tip: Not all participating providers are offering a connected device, so this might be something families consider when selecting which participating provider they will use.

A-3. Who is eligible for the EBB Program?

Households with a child who has received approval for benefits under the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) or the School Breakfast Program (SBP), including a child who attends a school participating in the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), are eligible for the EBB Program. This includes any child who currently receives benefits during the 2020–2021 school year or did so in the 2019–2020 school year. For 2019–2020 or 2020–2021 CEP-participating schools or districts, all students are eligible for the EBB Program.

¹ The EBB Program will use the same definition of Tribal lands as used in the Lifeline program, including certain lands near the Navajo Nation treated as Tribal lands. You can find a map of those Tribal lands at <https://www.usac.org/lifeline/get-started/enhanced-tribal-benefit/#Eligible>. The definition for “Tribal lands” used by the Lifeline program is found in 47 CFR 54.400(e), which states that “For purposes of this subpart, ‘Tribal lands’ include any federally recognized Indian tribe’s reservation, pueblo, or colony, including former reservations in Oklahoma; Alaska Native regions established pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (85 Stat. 688); Indian allotments; Hawaiian Home Lands – areas held in trust for Native Hawaiians by the state of Hawaii, pursuant to the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, 1920 July 9, 1921, 42 Stat. 108, *seq.*, as amended; and any land designated as such by the Commission for purposes of this subpart pursuant to the designation process in § 54.412.”

In addition, households can qualify for the EBB Program if the household has an income at or below 135 percent of the federal poverty guidelines **OR** any member of the household:

- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year;
- Is enrolled in or qualifies for the Lifeline program through participation in one of the following federal assistance programs:
 - Medicaid
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - Federal Public Housing Assistance
 - Veterans and Survivors Pension Benefit
- Participates in one of several **Tribal specific programs**: Bureau of Indian Affairs General Assistance, Tribal Head Start (only households meeting the relevant income qualifying standard), Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (Tribal TANF), Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations;
- Experienced a substantial loss of income due to job loss or furlough since February 29, 2020, and the household had a total income in 2020 at or below \$99,000 for single filers and \$198,000 for joint filers; or
- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating providers' existing low-income or COVID-19 internet service program.

A-4. How long will the EBB Program last?

The EBB Program is temporary unless Congress chooses to further extend the program. The EBB Program was developed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and will end once the program funds are exhausted or 6 months after the Department of Health and Human Services declares an end to the pandemic, whichever comes first. Providers must give participants at least 30 days' notice before the termination of the EBB Program so that participating households have time to decide whether to "opt-in" to continuing service.

A-5. Can participating households continue to receive broadband service when the EBB Program ends?

When the EBB Program ends, households will need to opt-in or request to continue broadband services with their provider before the provider can increase the household's monthly payment. If a participating household does not opt-in or select a new service plan with their provider, their broadband service will end once the EBB Program ends. Even if a participating household had service with the same provider before enrolling in the EBB Program, they will need to opt-in to continue broadband services after the program ends.

A-6. How do families sign up for the EBB Program?

1. Use USAC's [Companies Near Me](#) tool to confirm whether there is a participating internet service provider offering service in their area.

School Tip: Some participating providers may not have coverage in all parts of your community, so it is important for each family to check with the provider(s) listed for their zip code to confirm they offer service to their address.

2. There are several ways to sign up for the program, so families should contact their preferred participating provider for more information. A service provider may operate its own eligibility process if they have received approval from the FCC. The service provider also may work with the school to confirm household eligibility through the free or reduced price school lunch program or school breakfast program if the school has obtained written consent from the family to release such information. A service provider may also use or direct applicants to use the Lifeline National Eligibility Verifier (National Verifier) application process, which is administered by USAC. National Verifier applications can be completed at a participating service provider store location, [online](#), or via mail.
3. When applying, applicants must provide: (a) full name, (b) date of birth, and (c) address. To verify their identity, applicants may provide the last four digits of their Social Security Number (SSN), or their full Tribal Identification (ID) Number, or they can submit one of the following to verify their identity: a U.S. Government-issued ID, military ID, U.S. passport, U.S. driver's license or ID, or an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number. If the household is eligible through a child or dependent, applicants will also be asked to provide similar information for the benefit qualifying person. More information on forms of documentation is available on the USAC website: <https://getemergencybroadband.org/how-to-apply/show-you-qualify/>

School Tip: If households are unable or uncomfortable using the last four digits of their Social Security Number, they can use one of the other forms of identification listed above.

4. Verify eligibility. Families qualifying for the EBB Program using their NSLP or SBP eligibility status will also need to submit certain information and/or documentation to verify their eligibility for the EBB Program, depending on whether their child attends a CEP school or district:
 - For CEP schools or districts:
 - If applying [online](#), select the eligible CEP school/district from the dropdown menu.
 - If applying by mail, provide the school name, city, and state of a school that participates in the Community Eligibility Provision for the 2019–2020 and/or 2020–2021 school years.
 - For non-CEP schools or districts:
 - Documentation verifying student participation in the NSLP and SBP, including a school or district-issued letter confirming student participation in either program during the 2019–2020 or 2020–2021 school year. A [template letter](#) that can be adapted is available in the [outreach toolkit](#).

A-7. If families sign up directly for the EBB Program through the National Verifier, will our school/district be required to verify student free or reduced price school lunch program or the school breakfast program participation?

No. If families sign up directly for the EBB Program through the National Verifier, schools and districts will not be contacted to verify student participation in the NSLP and SBP.

- For CEP schools or districts, the USAC will automatically check the name of the CEP school or district against the [Food Research and Action Center \(FRAC\) database](#) to confirm CEP status and household's eligibility.
- For non-CEP schools, neither USAC nor the participating provider will be contacting the school or district to confirm the student's participation in the free or reduced price school lunch program or school breakfast program.

A-8. If our school or district is covering the cost of monthly internet service for students, can we be reimbursed by the EBB Program?

If the school, district, local government, or other community organization is paying the full cost of internet service and the receiving household does not pay any fee for the service, the EBB Program subsidy cannot be claimed by the school, district, etc. or the household. If any such local program ends, going forward eligible households could instead receive a discount through the EBB Program.

A-9. Can our school or district sign up eligible students and their families for the EBB Program?

It is possible for a school or district to verify the eligibility status of students and their families for the EBB Program; however, there are several important considerations:

1. **Protecting student privacy.** In accordance with student privacy requirements under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the National School Lunch program,² a school or district that initiates sign up for eligible students must obtain written consent to share student participation in the free or reduced price school lunch program or the school breakfast program with a participating provider. A [template consent form](#) that can be adapted is available in the outreach toolkit.
2. **Working with participating providers.** To verify eligibility, schools would need to work directly with the participating provider or providers in their area, and those providers may need to seek additional authorization from the FCC to operate their own verification process using the NSLP and SBP meal eligibility status information provided by the school. Schools interested in this option should discuss this with local providers directly to see if the providers have the ability to operate this type of verification process.

² Under FERPA, an educational agency (e.g., a local educational agency) or institution (i.e., a public elementary or secondary school, or an institution of postsecondary education) may not disclose personally identifiable information from student education records to a third party, such as an internet service provider, without prior written consent from a parent or eligible student, unless the disclosure meets an exception to FERPA's general consent requirement. See 20 U.S.C. §§ 1232g(b), (h), (i), and (j); 34 CFR §§ 99.30 and 99.31. In addition, Section 9(b)(6) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) (42 U.S.C. § 1758(b)(6)), administered by the USDA, also applies to the use and disclosure of any information obtained from applications for free and reduced-price school meals.

A-10. Where can I find additional information about the EBB Program?

Additional information can be found on USAC's consumer website, <https://GetEmergencyBroadband.org>, or by calling the USAC Emergency Broadband Support Center at (833) 511-0311. You can also find information on the FCC's website, <https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>.

B. Strategies for School and District Outreach to Families

As trusted community members, schools and districts are encouraged to engage in outreach to eligible families. In addition, schools and districts can take steps to help families navigate the sign-up process. Consider using the following strategies to get the word out to families:

B-1. Use the outreach toolkit materials to inform eligible families about the EBB Program

The attached outreach toolkit includes sample social media graphics and posts, newsletter and email content, and printable fliers. Some of these materials have also been translated into Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Traditional Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, French, Somali, Amharic, Burmese, and Russian. You can also download this content and other helpful outreach materials at the FCC's website <https://www.fcc.gov/emergency-broadband-benefit-outreach-toolkit> and at USAC's website <https://getemergencybroadband.org/help/resources/>. Consider the best communication methods for reaching your eligible families, including sending emails or newsletters, distributing printed fliers with school lunches, or using social media channels. These materials can be adapted or customized for your school or district.

B-2. Create an outreach team or partner with a trusted community-based organization

Limited digital skills or language barriers may present barriers to families navigating the sign-up process. Families may also be hesitant to share personal information required for sign-up. These barriers may disproportionately impact English learners, children of immigrants without documentation, or students experiencing homelessness. Launching an outreach team made up of students, families, or trusted community partners can help address these barriers to access. DigitalBridgeK-12 has resources on how to start and train an outreach team and outreach tips and templates: <https://digitalbridgek12.org/needs-assessment-playbook/>.

B-3. Help families identify participating providers

The first step to sign up for the EBB Program is to confirm which local providers are participating in the program. Schools and districts can proactively help eligible families identify which local providers are participating by assembling a list of participating providers by zip code using the USAC [Companies Near Me](#) tool. Providing this localized list along with the EBB Program information may be helpful for families that have limited technology access, digital skills, or language barriers. Alternatively, a school or district outreach team can offer in-person or virtual support for eligible families trying to identify participating providers. It is important to note that there may be some communities that do not have any participating providers. In addition, rural communities without existing broadband infrastructure may be limited in their ability to take advantage of the EBB Program.

B-4. Organize a provider fair

Consider organizing a participating provider fair so that families can compare and ask questions about the available internet service plans offered by each local participating provider. Meeting local provider representatives provides an opportunity to begin building trust with families that may be hesitant to sign-up for a temporary program. Any provider fair should be consistent with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention COVID-19 guidelines and state/local requirements.

B-5. Adapt and send template letter verifying free or reduced price school lunch/school breakfast program participation [Non-CEP schools]

As noted in A-6, families with children attending non-CEP schools will need to provide documentation to verify their child's participation in the NSLP or SBP during the 2019–2020 or 2020–2021 school year. Due to the pandemic, it is likely that the last letter a family received confirming their child's participation in the free or reduced price school lunch program or school breakfast program may have been sent in fall 2019. We encourage schools or districts to consider adapting and sending the attached [template letter](#) as households may no longer have their eligibility status letter for the NSLP or SBP.

Disclaimers

This document was produced by the U.S. Department of Education (Department) regarding the Federal Communications Commission's Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB Program). Other than statutory and regulatory requirements included in the document, the contents of this guidance do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or the Department's or agency's policies.

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