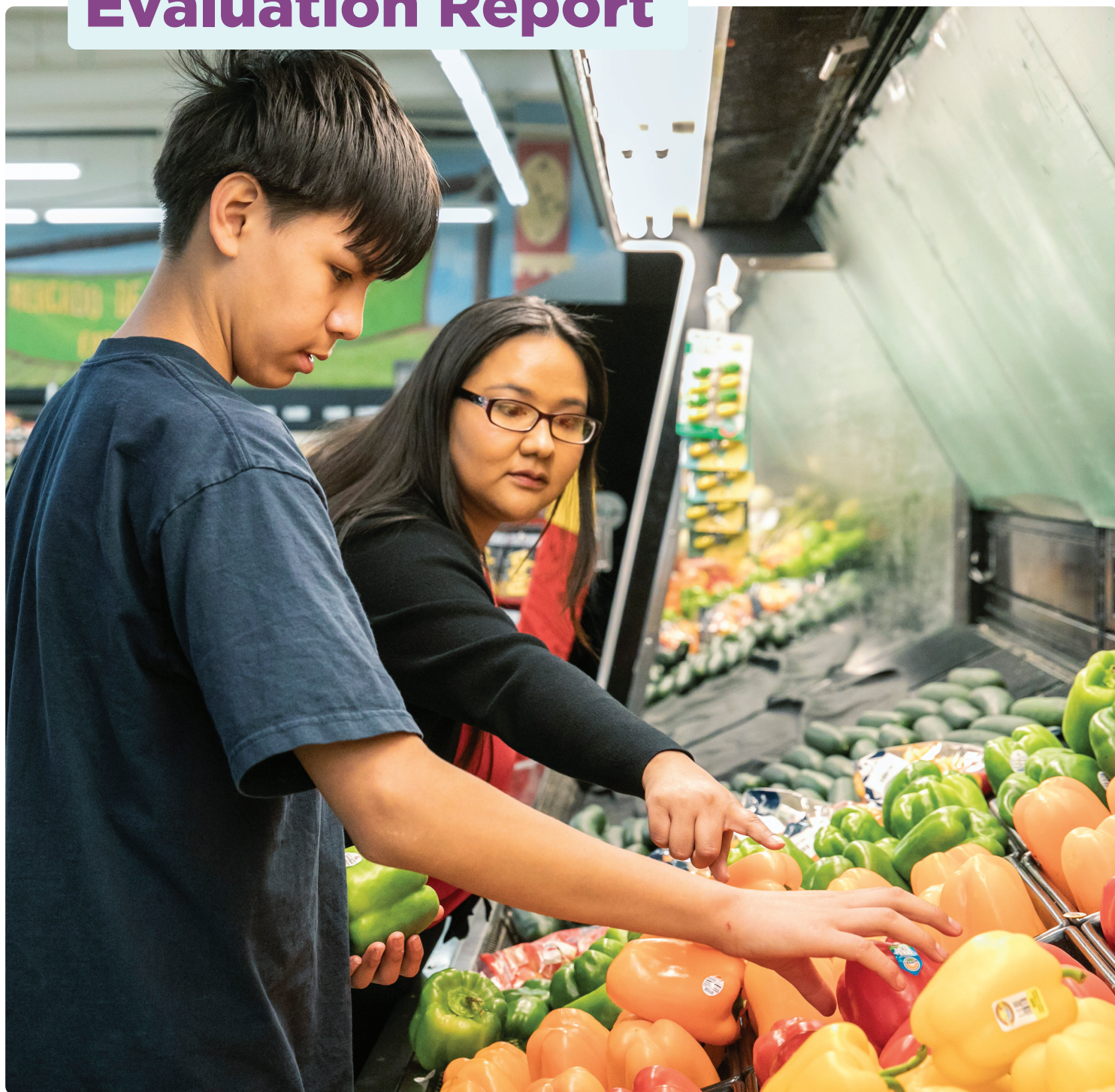


Summer EBT Outreach and Communications Pilots Evaluation Report



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summer EBT (SUN Bucks) provides \$120 in grocery benefits per child to eligible families during summer months when children lack access to school meals. To help more eligible families learn about and access these benefits, Share Our Strength partnered with state agencies and nonprofit campaign partners across six states (Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, Michigan, and Nebraska) to design, implement, and evaluate coordinated outreach strategies during summer 2025. This report documents what was done, what worked, and what conditions supported effective outreach across diverse state contexts using the RE-AIM framework. Below are the findings by domain:

- **REACH:** Social media campaigns generated over 21 million digital impressions across pilot states, and over 490 school staff and community partners were activated through NKH-hosted training webinars.
- **EFFECTIVENESS:** Among surveyed parents (n=1,322), 92% reported awareness of Summer EBT, with schools cited as the most common source of information (58%). Applications from families that needed to apply increased substantially in the three states with available administrative data, ranging from 149% to 1,360% increase in applications approved. Stakeholders across states reported fewer family inquiries and customer service calls compared to the prior year likely due to improved program awareness. Still, eligibility confusion remained a persistent challenge.
- **ADOPTION:** School staff demonstrated strong willingness to conduct outreach, particularly through low-burden strategies like social media, flyers, and existing communication channels. Adoption was highest when ready-to-use materials, training, and funding support were available.
- **IMPLEMENTATION:** Implementation was most successful where outreach began before the school year ended and used multiple channels simultaneously. Late timing of materials and program guidance was the most commonly cited barrier across pilot states.
- **MAINTENANCE:** Schools and partners expressed intent to continue outreach through existing channels. Integrating Summer EBT messaging into routine school communications at the end of the academic year was identified as the most viable path to long-term sustainability.

These findings point to the following recommendations for effective Summer EBT outreach: early and consistent communication, schools engaged as trusted messengers, ready-to-use tools that reduce burden on partners, and coordination structures that extend reach across agencies and community organizations. Summer 2025 pilot lessons are documented in full throughout this report and translated into actionable guidance in [No Kid Hungry's Outreach Playbook for Summer EBT Resources](#).



II. BACKGROUND

Summer EBT (also known as SUN Bucks) is a federal nutrition program that provides \$120 in grocery benefits per child to eligible families during summer months when children lack access to school meals. No Kid Hungry's Summer EBT Communications and Outreach Grant Program (SEBT OCP) partnered with State agencies and state campaign partners¹ across five states to increase awareness, raise application rates, and improve benefit redemption among participating families.

Summer EBT Outreach Strategies

Several outreach and communication strategies were proposed and/or implemented to promote program awareness, knowledge, and desired behaviors (e.g., checking eligibility, submitting applications for those not streamlined certified, redeeming benefits). Below is a list of the strategies that state partners may have used in pilot states. Each state implemented the strategies that worked locally.

Table 1.a. Outreach Strategy Glossary

OUTREACH STRATEGY	DEFINITION
Communications Plan Development	A structured planning process in which state agencies and partners identify target audiences, key messages, outreach channels, and implementation timelines to guide coordinated Summer EBT outreach efforts.
CEP outreach	Outreach targeting schools that participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which automatically enrolls all students in free meals, to ensure eligible families are informed about Summer EBT benefits and that they may need to apply.
Social Media Campaigns	Paid posts on platforms (e.g., Facebook, Reddit) used to increase awareness, share key messages, and direct families to additional resources such as eligibility checkers or applications.
School-Based Communications	Outreach delivered through existing school communication channels, including emails, newsletters, robocalls, text messages, and district websites.
Eligibility Checker Tools	Online tools that allow families to assess whether they are eligible and need to apply for Summer EBT benefits and provide next steps based on their responses.
School Outreach Toolkits	Centralized sets of ready-to-use materials (e.g., templates, scripts, social media graphics) designed to support schools in communicating consistent Summer EBT messaging.
Staff Webinars and Trainings	Virtual or in-person sessions provided to school staff and community partners to build knowledge of the program and support effective outreach implementation.
Targeted District Outreach	Focused outreach efforts directed toward specific school districts or populations to increase awareness and application rates among priority groups.
Cross-Promotion with Summer Meals	Outreach efforts that integrate Summer EBT messaging into existing summer meal programs and sites to reach families already accessing food resources.

¹ State campaign partners are other statewide anti-hunger and other public services non-profit organizations working with Share Our Strength to promote Summer EBT.

OUTREACH STRATEGY	DEFINITION
One-on-One Application Assistance	Direct support provided to families to help them complete Summer EBT applications, often through school staff or community partners.
In-Person Outreach and Community Events	Engagement at locations such as schools, summer meal sites, libraries, churches, and community events where staff provide information and answer questions directly.
Multilingual and Translated Materials	Outreach materials adapted into multiple languages to improve accessibility and reach families with limited English proficiency.
Digital Communication Materials	Development of websites, QR codes, text messaging platforms, and email campaigns to efficiently distribute information and connect families to resources.

Pilot states and partners

The Summer EBT OCP strategies were implemented in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, Michigan, and Nebraska through a mix of administering agencies and nonprofit organizations (i.e., State Campaign Partners). Share Our Strength (No Kid Hungry, NKH) provided strategic direction, technical assistance, and financial and evaluation support across all states. State agencies administered benefits and nonprofit organizations conducted outreach directly to families. Additionally, selected school districts (referred to as “focus districts” in this report) tested specific outreach strategies that schools can use to conduct outreach. State campaign partners executed school and community outreach, and adapted materials to their communities.

NKH conducted the following activities in the pilot states:

- **ALABAMA:** Partnered with Feeding Alabama, the Alabama Department of Education, and the Department of Human Resources to place billboards in strategically targeted areas, host a training webinar for school and community partner outreach, and run a social media outreach campaign.
- **ARIZONA:** Partnered with the Arizona Food Bank Network (AZFBN) to enhance communications planning, conduct CEP school outreach, host a webinar for school staff and community partners, and run a social media campaign.
- **ARKANSAS:** Partnered with the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance (AHRA) to align messaging across state agencies, conduct targeted school district outreach, and run a social media outreach campaign.
- **KENTUCKY:** Partnered with Feeding Kentucky, the Department for Community Based Services, and the Kentucky Department of Education to develop a CEP school outreach toolkit, host a webinar for school staff and community partners, and integrate an eligibility checker in English and Spanish.
- **MICHIGAN:** Partnered with the Michigan Department of Education to implement a school outreach toolkit, host a school staff webinar, integrate an eligibility checker in English and Spanish, and run a social media outreach campaign.
- **NEBRASKA:** Partnered with the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to develop a school outreach toolkit, host a school staff webinar, integrate an eligibility checker in English and Spanish, and run a social media outreach campaign.



Table 1.b Directly NKH-supported activities by State

ACTIVITY	AL	AR	AZ	KY	MI	NE
Communications Plan Support	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CEP School Outreach		✓	✓	✓		✓
Statewide Social Media Campaign	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Multi-lingual Eligibility Checker Integration				✓	✓	✓
Staff Webinars/Training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Focus District Outreach		✓	✓	✓		✓
Webpage Development		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Outreach Material Development (e.g., billboards, digital materials)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Evaluation Purpose and Objectives

The evaluation is organized around the reach, effectiveness, adoption, implementation, and maintenance (RE-AIM) framework.² RE-AIM is a widely used implementation science model that examines how programs, interventions, and strategies are adopted, delivered, and sustained in the real world.³ The five RE-AIM domains provide structure to both assess whether the outreach met its intended goal and any modifications needed to meet the local setting's needs.

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- 2 Glasgow, R. E., Vogt, T. M., & Boles, S. M. (1999). Evaluating the public health impact of health promotion interventions: the RE-AIM framework. *American journal of public health*, 89(9), 1322-1327.
 - 3 Kwan, B. M., McGinnes, H. L., Ory, M. G., Estabrooks, P. A., Waxmonsky, J. A., & Glasgow, R. E. (2019). RE-AIM in the real world: use of the RE-AIM framework for program planning and evaluation in clinical and community settings. *Frontiers in public health*, 7, 345.

RE-AIM Domains Explained

- **REACH:** The number of eligible families who are exposed to outreach and communications, engage with messaging, or apply to the program because of the pilot efforts.
- **EFFECTIVENESS:** The impact of the outreach and communications on key outcomes, including increased program knowledge, awareness of eligibility, and applying for Summer EBT benefits (if needed).
- **ADOPTION:** The number, proportion, and representativeness of partner organizations, agencies, and school staff that choose to participate in and disseminate Summer EBT messages or otherwise support implementation of the pilot strategies.
- **IMPLEMENTATION:** Barriers and facilitators to implementation of outreach strategies, especially from the perspective of implementers (e.g., school districts). Also includes adaptations and changes made to NKH strategy and materials to fit the local context.
- **MAINTENANCE:** The degree to which effective outreach and communication practices are sustained beyond the pilot period.

The evaluation questions were as follows:

- **REACH:** How many caregivers of eligible children were reached by the strategies implemented in each state? How many school and community stakeholders were reached and activated to do outreach due to NKH-supported strategies?
- **EFFECTIVENESS:** How effective were the messaging/strategies in increasing program knowledge, awareness of eligibility, and Summer EBT applications for families that need to apply?
- **ADOPTION:** How open are school staff, state agencies, and partners to implementing outreach strategies?
- **IMPLEMENTATION:** How well were planned outreach and communication strategies implemented? What modifications made the strategies work? What were the major barriers?
- **MAINTENANCE:** Can the efforts be sustained beyond the grant program/NKH staff support? What resources/supports can help with sustainability of the recommended strategies?



III. METHODS

Evaluation Design

This evaluation uses a concurrent mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to triangulate findings and answer multiple evaluation questions.⁴ Rapid qualitative analysis findings are integrated with survey and administrative data to identify lessons learned.

Data Sources

We used several data collection methods. Data were collected between September and November 2025 across pilot states to capture both outreach reach and stakeholder experiences.

- **SURVEYS:** A parent survey was fielded from October through November 2025 and disseminated via targeted digital ads and school district communication channels (e.g., emails, newsletters, flyers with QR codes). A school staff survey was distributed in November 2025 to capture perspectives on outreach efforts and future intentions to adopt strategies. We asked State Campaign partners and used a listserv of school staff attendees who attended NKH Summer EBT webinars on outreach and communications in the spring of 2025. Respondents were excluded from the listserv if they worked in a focus district to obtain perspectives from school districts not receiving NKH support.
- **INTERVIEWS AND DEBRIEFS:** Semi-structured discussions were conducted between September 2025 and October 2025 with school staff (n=4 discussions involving 13 school staff) in a subset of focus and non-focus districts to understand outreach implementation and perceived impact. State agency and campaign partner debriefs (n=7 debriefs with 22 State agency and State Campaign Partner staff) were conducted across pilot states to document outreach strategies, successes, and challenges.
- **PROGRESS REPORTS:** Nine focus school districts provided reports summarizing outreach activities and implementation experiences in September 2025.
- **KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR (KPI) METRICS:** Social media campaign, webinar analytics, and webpage metrics (e.g., impressions, clicks, click-through rates, views) were collected to assess exposure and engagement with social media ads, school guide kits webpages, and eligibility checkers.
- **ADMINISTRATIVE DATA:** Administrative application data were requested from all pilot states; however, data for 2024 and 2025 were obtained from only three states.

4 Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2017). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Sage publications

Table 2.a. Summary of quantitative and qualitative data sources

QUANTITATIVE DATA	QUALITATIVE DATA
• School staff survey (10/30/25-11/21/25) • Parent survey (10/02/25-11/27/25) • Digital key performance indicator (KPI) metrics • Administrative application data	• State agency and campaign partner debriefs • School staff discussions • Focus school districts reports • Social media comments in Summer EBT social media ads

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively to summarize outreach reach, engagement, and application trends. Qualitative data were analyzed using a rapid qualitative analysis approach,⁵ with findings organized by RE-AIM domains to identify key themes related to outreach strategy adoption and implementation, perceived impact, and sustainability.

Findings were triangulated across data sources to strengthen validity and provide a comprehensive understanding of how outreach strategies performed across states and stakeholder groups.

Table 2.b. Data Analysis Overview

QUANTITATIVE DATA	QUALITATIVE DATA	INTEGRATED ANALYSIS
• Descriptive analysis of survey responses aligned with RE-AIM domains • Analysis of outreach reach metrics (e.g., impressions, engagement) • Analysis of administrative application trends in 2024 and 2025 for three states	• Rapid qualitative analysis using structured matrix aligned with RE-AIM domains	• Narrative integration of quantitative and qualitative findings

Limitations

Evaluating outreach efforts across multiple states with varying capacity presents inherent limitations. Not all states completed all data collection activities, including the parent survey, school staff interviews, and reach metrics, which has implications for the comparability of findings across sites. For example, administrative application data were only available from three states. Differences in how partners tracked and reported outreach activities further affect the consistency of reach metrics. Survey and interview data reflect participants' perceptions and recall and thus may not fully capture actual applications resulting from NKH-supported outreach strategies. Therefore, findings should be interpreted with these limitations in mind.

5 Vindrola-Padros, C. (2021). Doing rapid qualitative research (1st ed., Chapter 5: Data interpretation and analysis). Sage Publications.

IV. FINDINGS BY RE-AIM DOMAIN

A. Reach

We assessed reach using digital campaign metrics, parent survey data, and qualitative feedback from schools, states, and partners to understand how families were reached and engaged with Summer EBT outreach. As a foundational step to increase reach and promote consistent Summer EBT messaging, NKH and state campaign partner organizations in pilot states engaged in partner activation. Specifically, webinars and training in all five pilot states helped to equip school staff and community partners to serve as trusted messengers. Shortly after, direct-to-family social media campaigns reached a large number of eligible caregivers, as reflected in over 21 million digital impressions, and widespread exposure through school and partner communication channels.

Schools, the most trusted and consistent channel for reaching families, noted some uncertainty about whether digital outreach translated into applications. They also indicated that some groups (e.g., migrant families, families experiencing housing instability, and those with limited English proficiency) were potentially harder to reach without the presence of a community engagement school staff member (e.g., McKinney Vento staff, family outreach specialists, etc.).

Partner Activation Webinar Analytics

In all pilot states, NKH and partnering organizations hosted webinars for school staff and community partners as a foundational step to amplify reach. Rather than reaching families directly, these sessions were designed to activate a network of trusted messengers (i.e., teachers, school staff, and community organization staff) who could then carry Summer EBT information into their own networks. The sessions provided local partners with program knowledge, ready-to-use materials, and clear guidance on eligibility before the direct-to-family social media campaign launched. Webinars covered program eligibility, the distinction between automatic enrollment and application, the eligibility checker tool, and a walkthrough of outreach materials available to staff. Over 600 school staff and community partners registered and 490 attended these webinars.

Table 3.a. Summer EBT Webinar for School and Community Partners Analytics

WEBINAR	REGISTRATION	ATTENDEES
Arizona	118	98
Alabama	122	101
Kentucky	131	104
Michigan	127	99
Nebraska	109	88

School Outreach Kit Webpage Analytics

The school outreach kits served as a centralized outreach hub for school staff seeking information to address common concerns and provided strategies to minimize confusion about Summer EBT benefits. It contained pre-written emails, text messages, flyers, robocall script and social media content, as well as links to key resources (e.g., an eligibility checker and an application). This allowed schools to communicate program information directly to families in their communities.

School outreach kit web traffic varied substantially by state, with higher engagement in states where materials were promoted earlier and more consistently. Arizona and Nebraska saw clear peaks in May, aligning with end-of-school-year outreach. Michigan and Kentucky had the highest overall engagement, with 32,622 and 2,932 total views respectively. Michigan saw traffic peaks in both June and August, suggesting sustained promotion across the outreach window. Alabama and Arkansas had the lowest engagement, consistent with later launch timing and limited webpage promotion.

Table 3.b. School Guide Web Traffic by State

STATE	METRIC	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	TOTAL
Alabama	Views	-	-	104	194	1	2	301
	Users	-	-	9	85	1	2	97
Arizona	Views	11	695	106	94	34	9	949
	Users	1	203	35	33	14	6	292
Arkansas*	Views	8	103	1	39	4	14	169
	Users	1	16	1	8	2	2	30
Kentucky	Views	-	1,712	545	318	116	33	2,932
	Users	-	-	-	-	-	-	Not available
Michigan	Views	-	451	15,416	4,854	11,165	115	32,622
	Users	-	-	-	-	-	-	Not available
Nebraska	Views	354	721	96	72	92	14	1,349
	Users	34	171	44	36	22	9	316

*Notes: Webpage not widely promoted.

Direct-to-Families Digital Tools Metrics

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN

Phase 1 lasted from May to June 2025, and focused on awareness building and message testing. Ads were delivered primarily through Facebook and Reddit. Messaging content focused on: general awareness (i.e., “Summer EBT is back”), messaging emphasizing deadlines, and prompts encouraging families to check eligibility using a checker (i.e., parents entered into a form income, household size, and program participation to determine their eligibility for Summer EBT benefits). Phase 2 lasted from mid-July to early September 2025 and emphasized more action-oriented messaging. Phase two messaging also highlighted urgency and next steps, such as checking eligibility or submitting an application. Campaigns were implemented in pilot states (Alabama, Arkansas, Michigan, Nebraska) and additional states (e.g., California, New York, Ohio).

Within each state, Phase 1 ads were initially geared toward targeted areas: those where families with children were expected to be more likely to need the program as determined by zipcode. As ad effectiveness was assessed against the metrics described here, delivery was expanded to run statewide in Phase 2. Campaign budgets for social media advertisements were approximately \$10,000 per state, and campaign schedules were aligned with state application deadlines. The Kentucky and Arizona partners led the social media campaigns independently using the same designed materials with identical messaging.

Table 3.c. Social media campaign objectives and approach

	PHASE 1	PHASE 2
Objective(s)	Increase summer EBT awareness in targeted areas of key states to help ensure families with children in CEP districts/schools understand their eligibility for Summer EBT and take action to apply for the program.	Increase applications submitted from eligible families that need to apply.
Approach	Serve ads to parents and caregivers on paid social media across key states to spread helpful information about Summer EBT in their state. Test multiple messages to ensure that key details reach people and we have an opportunity to see which messages inspire action: • V1: General Awareness: “Summer EBT is Back / Here” • V2: Urgency: “Don’t Miss Out!” with deadline details • V3: Check Eligibility: “You’ve Got Options” encouraging people to check if they qualify	Streamline messaging to parents and caregivers on paid social media across key states, reinforcing urgency through key details around state deadlines and necessary steps (i.e. “check eligibility,” “sign up by [date]”). Ensure that messaging feels tailored to each state audience by using “Summer EBT” or “SUN Bucks,” English or Spanish, etc.

Key Metrics Explained

- **IMPRESSIONS:** the total number of times an ad was displayed on a screen; it reflects the potential size of the audience exposed to the Summer EBT targeted ads in the pilot states.
- **CLICKS:** the number of times someone actively clicked on the link associated with the ad in order to find more information about Summer EBT. Higher is better as it shows a concrete step toward the desired behavior (e.g., checking eligibility or applying to receive benefits).
- **CLICK-THROUGH RATE (CTR):** the share of people who saw the ad and clicked on it (clicks divided by impressions). Higher is better as it means that more families found the ad relevant and took action.
- **COST PER CLICK (CPC):** the average dollar amount spent for each click on an ad (total ad spend divided by total clicks). Lower is better as it means that the campaign reached more engaged families per dollar spent.
- **WEBPAGE VIEWS:** the total number of times a webpage (e.g., school guide or eligibility checker) was loaded or viewed. Views reflects overall exposure to the content but may include repeat visits by the same user.
- **WEBPAGE USERS:** the number of unique individuals who visited the webpage.

Outreach metrics indicate that the Summer EBT's social media efforts successfully reached potential families across participating states. Key insights from the data:

- Phase 1 reach and engagement outcomes: Generated over 12.4 million impressions and nearly 97,000 clicks across platforms.
 - Facebook accounted for most engagement, with a click-through rate (CTR) of approximately 0.79% and a cost per click (CPC) of \$0.95.
 - Reddit ads generated substantially lower engagement and higher costs, with a CTR of approximately 0.58% and a CPC of \$3.99.
- Phase 2 reach and engagement outcomes: Generated over 9.4 million impressions and more than 104,000 clicks.
 - Overall campaign efficiency improved in Phase 2 compared with Phase 1. The average cost per click decreased from \$0.95 in Phase 1 to approximately \$0.48 in Phase 2, while the overall click-through rate increased from 0.79% to 1.11%.

FACEBOOK BENCHMARKS VS. CAMPAIGN RESULTS

CLICK-THROUGH RATE (CTR). In 2025, “good” Facebook CTRs for traffic campaigns generally fell between 0.9% and 1.6% across industries, with top performers exceeding that range. The campaign’s Phase 1 CTR of 0.79% was slightly below this range—a reasonable baseline for a new campaign focused on message testing. By Phase 2, the CTR rose to 1.11%, crossing into the “good” range. Arizona was a standout: its combined CTR of 1.72% met or exceeded the top of the 1.4%-1.7% band that most analysts projected for 2025.

COST PER CLICK (CPC). The median Facebook CPC for nonprofit campaigns in 2025 was \$0.39, ranging from \$0.28 to \$0.54 over the course of the year. The Phase 1 CPC of \$0.95 exceeded this median, which is unsurprising for a new campaign without optimization history. Phase 2’s CPC of \$0.48 shows a strong result at the upper end of the nonprofit median range and several states reached \$0.65–\$0.87, a reasonable level that trended in the right direction.

REDDIT BENCHMARKS VS. CAMPAIGN RESULTS

Reddit is a more challenging platform for this type of campaign. Average CTR on the platform is around 0.5%, with 0.7%-0.8% achievable through sharp creative and strong audience fit. CPC typically runs \$0.20-\$0.50 for broad-reach campaigns but can range from \$0.50 to \$4.00 for niche or highly targeted campaigns, depending on targeting specificity and subreddit competition.

Against these benchmarks, the Phase 1 Reddit CTR of 0.58% was right in line with typical platform performance. The CPC of \$3.99 fell at the high end of the targeted-campaign range, likely reflecting the niche geographic targeting needed to reach low-income families in specific states. This is worth noting in the report, but it is not necessarily a shortcoming given the targeting complexity involved.

OVERALL STATE PERFORMANCE

Across pilot states, impressions generally increased from Phase 1 to Phase 2, with the largest gains in Michigan and Alabama. Engagement patterns varied: click-through rates held steady in Arkansas and improved in Nebraska and Alabama, while Michigan saw a slight CTR decline alongside its expanded reach. Cost efficiency improved across most states, with CPC decreasing from Phase 1 to Phase 2.

Arizona and Kentucky ran partner-led campaigns using shared materials and messaging and were standout performers. Arizona achieved the highest CTR of any participating state at 1.72%, with a CPC of \$0.49 across both phases. Kentucky ran a shorter 10-day campaign on a \$5,000 budget yet generated over 928,000 impressions and nearly 15,000 clicks across two ads, with CTRs of 1.64% and 1.56%, well above the broader campaign average and comparable to Arizona’s results.

Table 3.d. Social Media Campaign Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) by State

STATE	PHASE	IMPRESSIONS	CLICKS	CTR	CPC
Alabama	Phase 1	1,397,033	10,472	0.75%	\$0.95
	Phase 2	1,938,744	14,654	0.76%	\$0.68
Arizona	Phase 1 & 2	1,462,705	25,130	1.72%	\$0.49
Arkansas	Phase 1	1,506,778	10,047	0.67%	\$1.00
	Phase 2	1,712,299	11,540	0.67%	\$0.87

STATE	PHASE	IMPRESSIONS	CLICKS	CTR	CPC
Kentucky*	Ad 1	451,000	7,403	1.64%	\$0.34
	Ad 2	476,800	7,452	1.56%	-
Michigan	Phase 1	1,813,210	14,349	0.79%	\$0.70
	Phase 2	2,207,947	15,340	0.69%	\$0.65
Nebraska	Phase 1	1,378,545	7,908	0.57%	\$1.26
	Phase 2	1,301,527	8,603	0.66%	\$1.16

CTR = Click through rate; CPC = cost per click

*Ran the ads for 10 days on \$5,000 budget.

Eligibility checker metrics

The eligibility checker served as a digital tool for families to determine whether they needed to apply and provided information about next steps. While this was implemented in several states, comparable data are not available for other eligibility checkers beyond Nebraska, Kentucky and Michigan, as they lacked built-in tracking capabilities and were hosted on the State agency or State campaign partner websites.

- In Nebraska, the eligibility checker reached nearly 22,965 total views (15,174 from paid social ads and 7,791 from toolkit-linked use), with early traffic driven by paid promotion and a larger peak in August from toolkit-linked access.
- In Kentucky, the eligibility checker saw substantially higher overall traffic, with 38,718 total views and 27,058 unique users across the campaign period. Kentucky's traffic was highest in May (before school is out and school-based communications occur) and August (when the social media campaign was operating).
- In Michigan, the eligibility checker received 8,922 total views and 6,726 unique users across the campaign period. Traffic was highest in May and declined steadily through September, suggesting that promotion was concentrated earlier in the outreach window rather than sustained across the full summer.

Table 3.e. Summer EBT eligibility checker metrics

STATE	METRIC	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	TOTAL
Kentucky	Views	12,142	5,453	1,879	19,244	-	38,718
	Users	8,884	3,988	1,550	12,636	-	27,058
Michigan	Views	3,214	2,930	1,440	1,008	329	8,922
	Users	2,380	2,247	1,073	771	255	6,726

STATE	METRIC	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	TOTAL
Nebraska	Views	-	7,754	4,579	10,619	13	22,965
	Users	-	7,001	2,122	4,927	11	14,061

Qualitative findings on populations reached and gaps

Qualitative findings from school staff discussions, focus school district reports, and State agency and partner debriefs elaborate on how reaching parents played out across pilot states and any potential gaps in reach. Schools emerged as a primary and most trusted channel for reaching families. They leveraged existing direct communication channels (e.g., parent apps, SMS, email, social media pages) to communicate about Summer EBT. Digital outreach broadened exposure, but some State agency and school staff mentioned their uncertainty about whether outreach efforts translated into applications.

Certain populations, such as families experiencing housing instability, migrant families, and those with limited English proficiency, remained harder to reach through standard channels. Specialized positions, such as McKinney-Vento staff and other community liaisons (where available) were more “plugged in” to how to communicate with these families. Broadly speaking, timing mattered: outreach that arrived too late or after the school year reduced families’ opportunities to learn about the program through their schools. Strong multi-partner collaboration was also identified as increasing reach, as partnering organizations leveraged existing communication channels.

Table 3.f. Key Themes on Reach

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Schools served as a critical outreach mechanism.	School districts reported reaching households through direct communication strategies, including messages through parent apps, emails, robocalls, flyers, newsletters, and social media. They also reported leveraging summer meal sites, family resource centers, and school offices to disseminate information.	“We have around 7,000 students and they were all emailed the information... offices handed out flyers as well.” – Focus school district report “Robocalls and emails go out to every family... we have 2,600 students, though many are multiple children in one household.” – Focus school district report “Families were provided information at summer feeding sites and local health clinics.” – Focus school district report “Direct communication from the district reached about 38,000 households” – Focus school district report

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Digital outreach expanded reach.	State agencies and partners described substantial website traffic, social media exposure, and targeted digital messaging. For example, one state reported over 38,000 website views and increased application submissions compared to the prior year, suggesting that outreach efforts contributed to improved program awareness. However, stakeholders also expressed uncertainty about whether digital impressions translated into meaningful awareness or action, particularly among families required to apply.	"We had over 38,000 views on our website, with the biggest spikes before the application deadline." – State agency staff "We did a social media push in certain areas, but it was hard to tell how that translated into applications." – State campaign partner
More socially vulnerable eligible families were more difficult to reach.	Stakeholders consistently identified families experiencing housing instability, migrant families, families with limited English proficiency, and households in CEP schools as groups that were harder to reach through standard outreach channels. Barriers included lack of permanent mailing addresses, mobility during the school year, stigma associated with applications, and confusion about eligibility requirements.	"Migrant and homeless families likely weren't able to access the benefit... they may not have had a mailing address or a way to communicate." – School staff "Some families were afraid to apply or even ask about the program." – State agency
Timing and clarity of messaging improved reach	School staff reported that families' most common questions related to benefit timing, application approval status, and eligibility rules. Several stakeholders noted that outreach concentrated later in the summer may have contributed to missed application opportunities.	"The most common questions were: When will I receive the benefit? Was my application approved? Why did only one child qualify?" – School staff "Some families realized too late that they needed to apply." – School staff "It's important that issues are responded to in June or July, when families actually need the funds." – School staff
Multi-partner collaboration supported reach	State agencies emphasized that collaboration with community organizations, churches, elected officials, and nonprofit partners helped expand outreach reach. Stakeholders viewed the Summer EBT program as new and still developing, noting that outreach reach and awareness are likely to improve as implementation infrastructure and messaging strategies mature.	"Targeted messaging in communities where partners were active seemed to improve engagement." – State agency

B. Effectiveness

Overall, findings across data sources suggest that outreach efforts were effective in increasing awareness and driving application numbers. Administrative data show large increases in application volume and application approvals across pilot states. Survey findings indicate that ads were successful at capturing attention, with opportunities to further strengthen calls to action and support follow-through. Among surveyed parents, 92% reported awareness of Summer EBT, with schools cited as the most common source of information (58%). Qualitative findings suggest improved awareness and fewer information-seeking calls to schools and State agencies compared to the prior year potentially due to communication and outreach efforts.

Some challenges remained, such as confusion about eligibility and application barriers. Social media comments below the posted advertisement showcased areas for improvement, particularly in timely updates and user experience, which is beyond the scope of the outreach and communication pilots but may offer insight into the next phase of the work.

Administrative data on applications

Application data across pilot states that provided administrative data (n=3) show substantial increases in applications among families required to apply. **State A** saw a higher application volume in 2025 (4,937 applications) than in 2024 (1,898 applications). In **State A**, approved applications increased from 1,259 in 2024 to 3,140 in 2025 (a 149% increase), while denials rose from 639 to 1,797 (a 181% increase). Notably, the ratio of approvals to denials remained fairly constant between years: approximately 2:1 in both 2024 and 2025. Therefore, the increase in denials was proportional to the overall growth in application volume rather than indicative of a change in eligibility determination or application quality.

In **State B**, approved applications increased from 9,222 to 19,409 (a 110% increase), with 22,380 denials in 2025, representing 53% of submitted applications. **State B** did not provide data on denied applications in 2024.

In **State C**, approved applications increased from 679 in 2024⁶ to 9,910 in 2025 (a 1,360% increase). However, denials were also high, totaling 18,949 in 2025 and representing 65% of submitted applications. **State C** also did not provide data on denied applications in 2024.

Table 4.a. Applications approved and denied in three pilot states

APPLICATIONS	2024	2025	APPLICATIONS	2024	2025	APPLICATIONS	2024	2025
State A			State B			State C		
Approved	1,259	3,140	Approved	9,222	19,409	Approved	679	9,910
Denied	639	1,797	Denied	-	22,380	Denied	-	18,949
Total	1,898	4,937	Total	-	41,789	Total	-	28,859

6 It should be noted that in 2024 applications were opened for a short window of time, which may have also impacted the low number.

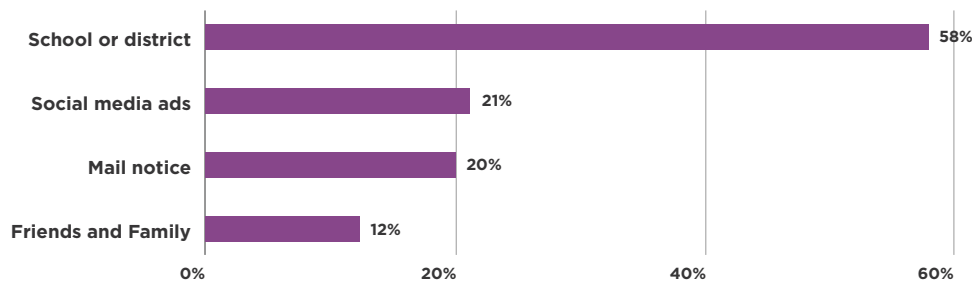
Parents survey insights on exposure to outreach

Among responding income-eligible parents in pilot states (n=1,322), 39% were from Arkansas, 19% from Michigan, 14% from Arizona, 12% from Alabama, 12% from Kentucky, and 4% from Nebraska. This survey meant to explore the reach of the recommended outreach strategies in the pilot states.

PROGRAM AWARENESS AND INFORMATION SEEKING

- Of all respondents, 92% reported being aware of the Summer EBT/SUN Bucks program.
- Parents most frequently reported learning about the program through schools or school districts (58%).
- Social media ads were cited by 21% of respondents as a source of program awareness.
- Mail notices (20%) and word-of-mouth from friends or family (12%) also played significant roles in informing other parents about the program.
- Most parents who sought more information said that online tools and websites were helpful for learning about Summer EBT/SUN Bucks, especially eligibility checker tools (89%), state government websites (84%), and SummerEBT.org (87%).
- Other commonly helpful sources included school staff (57%), and customer service helplines (52%).

Figure 1. How parents found out about Summer EBT in pilot states (n=1,322)



Survey findings on parent awareness and information needs

Ad perceptions

- Among parents who recalled seeing social media ads during summer 2025 (n=295), 75% reported that the ads caught their attention, and 54% found them easy to understand.
- However, a smaller proportion (36%) reported that the ads motivated them to seek additional information.
- Similar patterns were observed among parents who saw the ad for the first time in the survey, with 70% reporting attention capture and 32% reporting motivation to obtain information.

Communication preferences

- Parents most often preferred to receive information about Summer EBT/SUN Bucks through direct communication channels such as email (56%), text message (46%), and mail (40%), while fewer preferred digital channels like websites (21%) or social media posts (21%).
- When asked who they would most trust to provide information, a large majority preferred their child's school (76%), followed by government entities (36%) and community organizations (25%).
- Parents also indicated that the topics they wanted more information about were benefit issuance timing (56%), eligibility criteria (46%), and how to apply or enroll (38%).

Figure 2. Parents' preferred communication channels (n=1316)

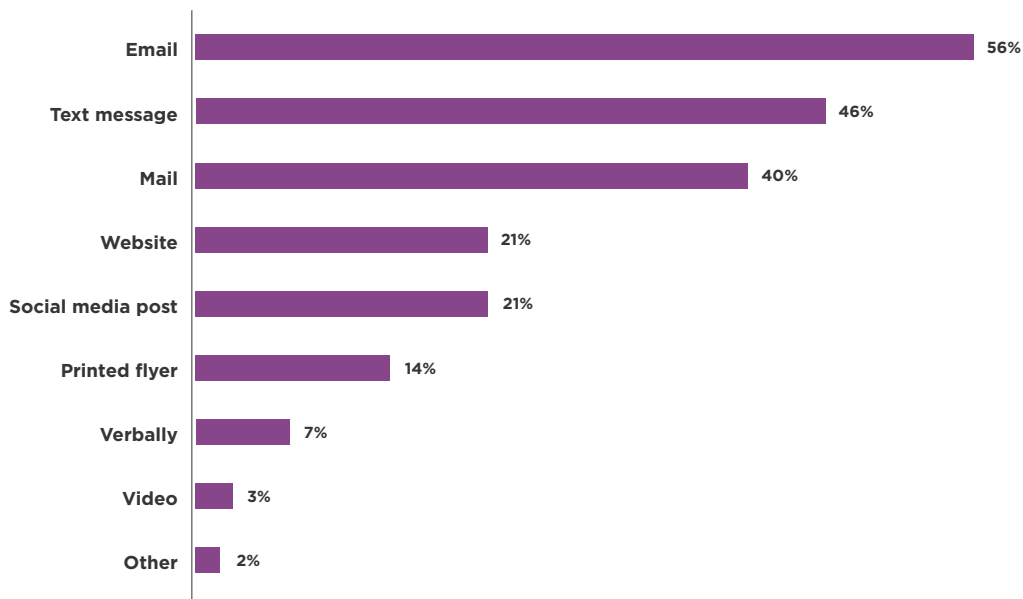
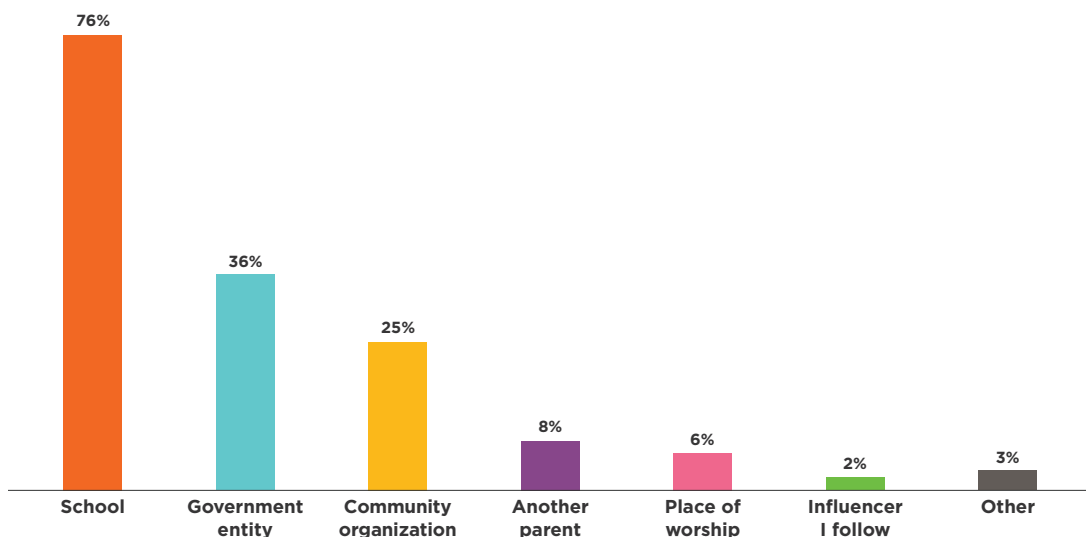


Figure 3. Sources parents most trust for SEBT information (n=1318)



Qualitative findings on perceived effectiveness

Qualitative findings from school staff interviews, focus district reports, and state agency and partner debriefs provided insight into how outreach strategies influenced family awareness/understanding of program eligibility and engagement with Summer EBT across pilot states. Stakeholders consistently reported that combining multiple outreach channels improved awareness and reduced confusion among families. Direct school communication via existing channels was perceived as one of the more effective strategies across stakeholders. Digital strategies (e.g., social media, text messaging) helped expand reach, provided convenient access to information, and were most effective when paired with direct or in-person support to help families navigate application steps. Across states, stakeholders noted fewer calls and questions than in the prior year, along with greater program awareness. However, persistent challenges remained, including confusion around eligibility rules, application requirements, and benefit issuance.

Table 4.b. Key Themes on Effectiveness

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Multi-channel direct outreach improved understanding and engagement from families.	Across states, stakeholders reported that direct communication strategies such as emails, phone calls, flyers, and newsletters were among the most effective outreach approaches. Combining multiple communication channels increased awareness and prompted follow-up questions from families.	“The most effective outreach methods were direct emails and direct mail. Most of the phone calls and emails we received were as a result of these methods.” – School staff “District communication through family newsletters and emails was great. It reached a large number of people and gave specific information and who to contact with questions.” – School staff
Digital outreach was efficient, potentially reduced stigma, and worked best when combined with other strategies.	Social media, text messaging, and online tools were viewed as efficient ways to share information broadly and conveniently. Stakeholders noted that digital outreach allowed families to access information privately, which may reduce stigma. However, digital approaches were most effective when paired with direct or in-person communication to support application completion and address questions.	“Social media and robocalls/text messages were most effective... it is easy to click on a link from wherever you are, and the stigma goes away when you don't have to walk up to a booth.” – School staff “We noticed the most calls to our office after our social media posts.” – School staff

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Outreach efforts contributed to improved awareness and fewer information-seeking calls to the customer support lines and to schools compared with the prior year.	Stakeholders across multiple states reported that outreach efforts appeared to improve family understanding of the program, reflected in fewer calls, emails, and urgent questions than in the first year of implementation.	"It was pretty quiet this summer... the first year it was nonstop questions. This summer it was a lot better." – State agency "This year compared to last year, it was night and day difference in the number of calls from parents. We are headed in the right direction." – School staff "My emails were down tremendously this year... the pilot supported family understanding." – State agency
Training, funding, and ready-to-use materials strengthened outreach implementation and effectiveness.	Stakeholders emphasized that grant funding, staff training, and pre-developed outreach materials improved their ability to conduct outreach and communicate consistent information.	"Having good training on what to tell parents was very helpful." – School staff "Having ready-to-use materials was effective... schools could use them without going through lengthy approval processes." – State campaign partner
Persistent eligibility confusion and administrative barriers limited outreach effectiveness.	Despite outreach efforts, stakeholders noted ongoing challenges related to understanding eligibility rules, application requirements, and benefit issuance processes.	"Families needed help understanding why one child received benefits and another did not." – School staff "Parents still think that if their child receives free meals at school, they should automatically get Summer EBT." – State agency "Families had issues accessing the application due to technical errors near the deadline." – School staff
Outreach contributed to perceived improvements in household food access and financial resources.	Stakeholders shared examples of how Summer EBT benefits helped families manage food costs and unexpected expenses during the summer months.	"Summer EBT funds gave one family flexibility to pay a utility bill without sacrificing groceries." – School staff "This money helps families cover meals at home when school is out." – School staff

Participant perspectives in social media comments

Social media comments on Summer EBT ads offer a window into family experiences with the program, including common frustrations and information needs. Because dissatisfied users are more likely to comment, these findings skew negative and should be interpreted accordingly. Still, the themes that emerge can help state agencies and partners align frequently asked questions (FAQ) resources and customer support with the questions and barriers families most commonly encounter.

OVERALL SENTIMENT

- Negative / Frustrated - Roughly 85%
- Neutral / Seeking Info - Roughly 10%
- Positive / Appreciative - Roughly 5%

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- High frustration among parents due to Summer EBT benefit delays, technical issues, and lack of support.
- Strong engagement with the issue, commenters tagging in friends who might benefit, or responding to other people who are struggling.
- Program is appreciated when it works, but most families encounter barriers that limit its effectiveness.
- Transparency and communication improvements are critical: clear eligibility, timely updates, and accessible support.

Areas for Improvement Discussed in Social Media Ads Comments

1. Delays and Pending Applications

- Weeks to months waiting for approval or card delivery.
- Siblings receiving cards inconsistently.

2. Card Access and Usability Issues

- Unable to activate cards or set PINs.
- Funds stolen or blocked; system errors.

3. Communication and Support Challenges

- Call centers described as confusing, unresponsive, or offering contradictory information.
- Emails were unanswered or redirected without resolution.

4. Eligibility Confusion

- Children under 6 or in private/daycare programs often excluded.
- Lack of clarity on income and school-based requirements.

5. Limited Program Impact

- Often a one-time payment; not sufficient for full summer needs.
- High grocery costs reduced perceived benefit.



C. Adoption

Across school stakeholders, State agencies, and state campaign partners, the findings indicate strong interest in adopting Summer EBT outreach strategies. All stakeholders felt increasingly familiar with the program each year of implementation, strongly valued outreach, and identified opportunities to align existing communication channels with parents. In several states, outreach efforts intentionally expanded engagement beyond school staff traditionally responsible for submitting data used for Summer EBT automatic issuance, such as school nutrition directors or business managers. Instead, schools sought to involve a broader range of family-facing personnel (e.g., front office staff, social workers, family resource coordinators, parent liaisons, and communications staff) who were well positioned to share information about the program directly with families.

School staff demonstrated particularly high engagement: in both the survey and interviews, they expressed a strong willingness to continue low-burden strategies such as social media, flyers, and disseminating ready-to-use messaging in routine communications. This was a recurring theme across stakeholders: adoption was highest when outreach recommendations fit within existing workflows and when they had easy access to ready-to-use materials, training, technical assistance, and funding support. In some states, campaign partners and project staff also engaged directly with participating schools through meetings and planning discussions to review outreach materials, answer questions, and explore outreach strategies in greater depth. These collaborative interactions appeared to help build stakeholder confidence and facilitate implementation. However, for more resource-intensive activities, such as providing one-on-one application assistance or fostering community partnerships for outreach, the potential for adoption was lower due to staff capacity constraints and competing priorities. Across all groups, findings suggest that sustained adoption depends on reducing implementation burden, strengthening coordination to ensure a consistent and unified message, and providing practical outreach tools and implementation support.

Below, we present insights by stakeholder group (school staff, State agencies, and state campaign partners) to reflect the distinct perspectives and contextual factors shaping adoption across implementers.

School Stakeholders

SURVEY FINDINGS ON SCHOOL INTENTION TO ADOPT OUTREACH STRATEGIES

- We conducted a survey to understand school stakeholders’ willingness to support Summer EBT outreach.
- The survey sample (n=74) reflects school stakeholders across multiple states: 45% Nebraska, 39% Michigan, 11% Arizona, and 5% Kentucky.

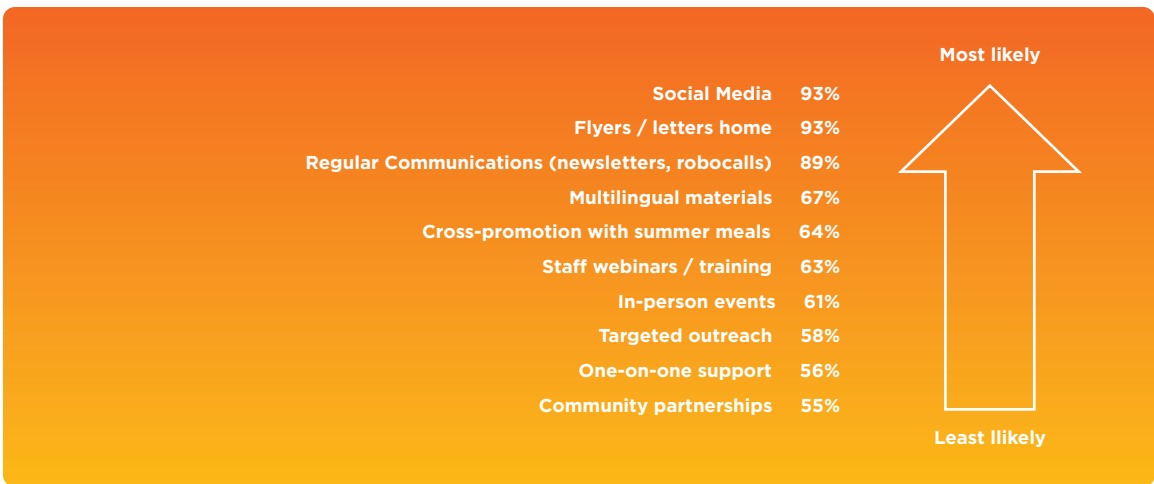
Program familiarity and engagement

- There was high familiarity with Summer EBT: 87% reported moderate to extreme familiarity with the program.
- We saw strong buy-in on the role of schools in outreach: 76% rated school communication as very to extremely valuable, 19% rated it moderately valuable, only 6% saw limited value.
- Most schools engaged in outreach activities: 88% reported their district conducted Summer EBT outreach.
- Among those conducting outreach, 61% found NKH resources helpful or very helpful; 20% did not use available resources.

Use of outreach materials/strategies by school staff

- Most likely to adopt: 93% Social media; 93% Flyers/letters home; 89% Regular communications (e.g., newsletters, robocalls); 67% Multilingual materials.
- Moderate likelihood: 64% Cross-promotion with summer meals; 63% Staff webinars/ training; 61% In-person events; 58% Targeted outreach.
- Lower likelihood: 56% One-on-one support; 55% Community partnerships.

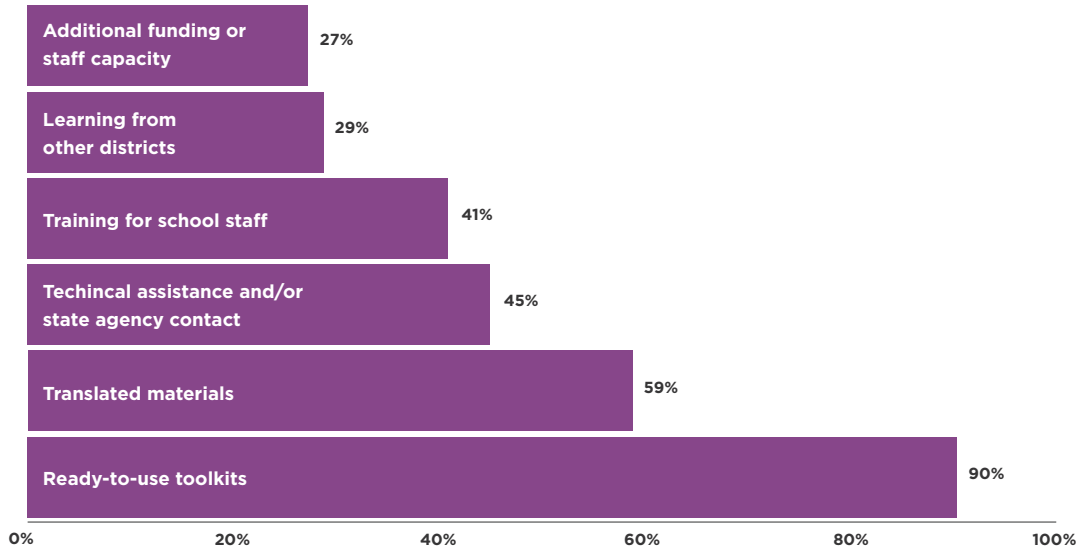
Figure 4. Percent of school staff who responded they were likely or very likely to adopt outreach materials/ strategies (n=74)



Challenges and requested supports

- Barriers to adoption: Staff time, capacity constraints and coordination complexity.
- Most requested supports: 90% Ready-to-use toolkits (flyers, scripts, social posts), 59% Translated materials, 45% Technical assistance (e.g., state contacts), 41% Staff training
- Preferred Summer EBT information delivery methods: 78% email, 67% Online hub, 55% Webinars, 26% district office channels

Figure 5. Facilitators of outreach strategy adoption by school staff (n=73)



QUALITATIVE FINDINGS ON FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS TO ADOPTING OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Supporting the survey findings, qualitative insights show that school engagement in outreach was made easier because activities fit into the communication they were already doing, such as newsletters, emails, and social media. Another facilitator of school participation was clear role assignment, staff training, and materials ready to use, which reduced the burden on already limited capacity. Still, competing priorities and limited staff time affected how much outreach schools could take on, particularly for more time intensive activities like application assistance.

Table 5.a. Key Themes on School Staff Adoption

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Schools were more likely to participate when outreach fit into communication they were already doing.	School stakeholders were more likely to adopt outreach strategies when they could integrate messaging into established communication channels such as newsletters, social media posts, and family liaison networks. This reduced administrative burden and facilitated broader dissemination.	"We used all the social media graphics... having them ready was great. We could add comments when posting. we didn't have to recreate the wheel." – School staff "District communication through newsletters and emails reached a large number of people and gave families clear information." – School staff
Limited staff time and competing priorities affected how much outreach schools could do.	Some districts did not engage in application assistance or more intensive outreach activities due to limited staffing, summer workload, or uncertainty about roles in program implementation.	"We did not assist households with applying for SUN Bucks." – School staff
Clear roles and training helped schools feel more confident doing outreach.	Engagement improved when outreach responsibilities were clearly assigned and staff received targeted training, particularly bilingual liaisons and program coordinators who could share information with families and school teams.	"Bilingual liaisons are important... we want them to have information beforehand rather than after they get many questions." – School staff
Ready-to-use materials made it easier for schools to take part.	School staff emphasized that ready-to-use outreach tools enabled participation even among districts with limited experience in nutrition program communications.	"Schools were willing to be part of it if they didn't have to create materials themselves." – State agency

State Agencies

QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS ON STATE AGENCY ADOPTION CHALLENGES AND MOTIVATORS

State agencies engaged in outreach primarily because they saw a clear need to improve participation and awareness, and viewed NKH partnership and coordination as a way to reduce their own administrative burden. Their ability to participate was strengthened by existing relationships with school districts and a general openness to outside support. However, capacity constraints and program complexity shaped how fully they could engage.

Table 5.b. Key Themes on State Agency Adoption

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
State agencies joined outreach because they saw a clear need and valued partnership.	State agency staff described joining outreach efforts to improve public understanding of the program and reduce the volume of one-on-one family inquiries. They viewed partnerships as making things better for the population they were trying to serve.	“I’ll take any and all support that will help the public and customers in any way... I like partnerships, think they make things better for people especially this population we’re trying to find support for.” – State agency
School districts were generally receptive and willing to pass materials on to families.	State agency staff found it relatively easy to get buy-in from school districts, particularly because Summer EBT is complex and schools valued having accurate, ready-to-use information they could trust.	“Any time we passed on the materials, they were willing to pass onto families; it took the burden off of them.” – State agency “Schools were willing to be part of it if they didn’t have to create it themselves.” – State agency
Targeting the right school-level roles improved uptake.	State agency staff noted that materials landed best with family-facing school roles such as family resource officers and school communication officers, and identified the need for a more direct line to those staff from the state level.	“It’s clear the toolkit landed with them and they were able to run with it... we want to think about the connection point at the state level for those roles; as direct a line as possible.” – State agency

State Campaign Partners

QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS ON STATE CAMPAIGN PARTNER ADOPTION CHALLENGES AND MOTIVATORS

Like State agencies, State campaign partners also engaged in outreach primarily because they saw a gap between eligible families and those receiving benefits, and recognized a need for a coordinating entity to fill that space. Their ability to participate was strengthened by funding, existing relationships, and flexible implementation structures. However, heavy workloads and competing program priorities limited how fully they could engage.

Table 5.c. Key Themes on Campaign Partner Adoption

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Partners joined outreach because they saw a need to improve participation and awareness.	Partners described joining outreach efforts to address low participation in earlier program years and to fill coordination gaps in Summer EBT communications where additional capacity was needed.	"There was a big gap between eligible and received benefits... we helped fill that space." – State Campaign partner
Funding and outside coordination made it easier for partners to engage.	Financial incentives, technical assistance, and coordination from national partners reduced barriers to participation and helped nonprofit stakeholders prioritize outreach activities.	"Having funding and ready-to-use tools gave schools an incentive to engage in outreach." – State Campaign partner
Heavy workloads and new program requirements shaped how much partners could take on.	Competing responsibilities, new program requirements, and limited staff capacity shaped how fully organizations could adopt outreach activities.	"Capacity was a big concern... summer meals and SUN Bucks together is a lot of work." – State Campaign partner
Existing relationships helped build trust and speed up participation.	Prior collaboration between nonprofit partners and school districts enabled faster buy-in and more coordinated outreach implementation.	"We had built trust with the state from last year... that helped us continue outreach." – State Campaign partner

D. Implementation

Insights from the debriefs and reports indicate that several Summer EBT outreach strategies were successfully delivered, although some states were not able to implement all strategies as originally intended in their planning. Across states, stakeholders emphasized the importance of using multiple outreach channels simultaneously to reinforce messaging and increase visibility of the program. Implementation was strongest when outreach was sustained over time, aligned with existing communication practices, and supported by ready-to-use materials, training, and translation resources. Schools served as the primary delivery mechanism for family-facing communication, while state campaign partners expanded capacity, coordinated efforts, and provided technical assistance. However, implementation was shaped by several challenges, including late timing of program approvals (delaying ability to finalize materials, publicize and share information), the complexity of eligibility and application processes, and administrative barriers that limited the effectiveness of outreach. Stakeholders adapted strategies throughout the implementation period to better meet local needs, highlighting the importance of flexibility, continuous learning, and cross-partner coordination in delivering effective outreach.



Table 6.a. Summary of NKH-supported outreach strategies implemented

STATE	OUTREACH STRATEGIES
Alabama	• Billboards were placed in targeted, high-need areas to promote program awareness. • A training webinar was hosted for school and community partners to build program knowledge and support outreach. • A statewide social media campaign was implemented to reach eligible families.
Arizona	• NKH developed and provided an outreach toolkit on a centralized website, and supported a school and community partner stakeholder webinar. • State campaign partners with support from SOS/NKH and oversight from the state agencies developed and distributed toolkits, school guides, and social media posts. • Schools used flyers, robocalls, text messages, school channels (e.g., PeachJar, ClassDojo), social media, and district webpages to share information. • Flyers were placed in libraries, laundromats, grocery stores, apartments, summer school sites). Staff set up in-person tables during summer school pickup. • Schools helped families complete applications, use screeners, and access translation support.
Arkansas	• Schools distributed flyers, posted on social media, and included information in newsletters. • Some districts used banners, t-shirts, and incentives (e.g., food giveaways) to promote the program. • Outreach also occurred at churches, job fairs, and community events. • State campaign partners provided funding, printed materials, translations, and targeted outreach and technical assistance to selected districts. • Schools primarily referred families to state hotlines or resources for application support.
Kentucky	• Schools shared information through newsletters, flyers, QR codes, and school websites, often through family resource staff and liaisons. • State campaign partners worked with NKH to develop and distribute toolkits, school guides, targeted social media advertisement, and hosted webinars. • Flyers were printed and distributed across districts, including translated materials. • Outreach included coordinated posting schedules and a centralized website with resources. • Schools answered questions and directed families to application tools and the eligibility checker.
Michigan	• NKH supported the State agency with outreach through a social media campaign, outreach materials, an eligibility checker, website content management, and webinars for school staff. • Communication focused on directing families to apply.
Nebraska	• Schools used emails, newsletters, and ongoing communication during the school year to share information. • The eligibility checker was developed, promoted through materials, and used by families to determine whether to apply. • State agencies provided training, communication templates, and support to schools. • Schools and state staff responded to family questions, and translation support was available.

Qualitative Insights on Implementation

Qualitative findings from school staff, state agency, and campaign partner debriefs, focus school reports, and meeting notes provide insight into how outreach strategies were implemented in practice. Across states, stakeholders described using multiple communication channels simultaneously and emphasizing ongoing, repeated communication to reinforce messaging and increase visibility among families.

Table 6.b. Key Themes on Implementation of the Outreach Strategies

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Schools and partners used multiple outreach channels at the same time.	Stakeholders described using flyers, robocalls, emails, newsletters, websites, social media, and in-person outreach at summer school, summer meal sites, and community events. Using several channels at once helped reinforce messages and increased the chances that families would see program information.	“We prioritized clarity, accessibility, and trust by using multiple communication channels... We also set up tables with food/giveaways at churches, job fairs, community events with laptops.” – School staff “A robocall, text message, and PeachJar went out... We set up a stand during summer school pickup for parents to come in and ask questions.” – School staff
Ongoing communication mattered more than one-time outreach.	Stakeholders emphasized that repeated outreach over time helped reduce confusion and improve visibility. This included messaging before the school year ended, during the summer, and again at the start of the school year.	“Ongoing communication is key.” – School staff “Consistency. More people were able to be reached due to messaging being consistent.” – School staff
Digital tools were used heavily because they were efficient and easy to share.	Social media graphics, websites, PeachJar, text messages, and boosted posts were commonly used because they were fast to distribute and easy for schools and partners to adapt.	“We dedicated a section of the webpage to SUN Bucks materials.” – School staff “Past years we’ve implemented regular ads... this year... we tried boosted posts. It ended up being amazing.” – State campaign partner

Qualitative insights on implementation barriers and facilitators

Despite strong engagement in outreach implementation, stakeholders identified several factors that influenced how effectively strategies were carried out. Emerging themes highlight key barriers related to timing, Summer EBT program complexity, and administrative challenges, as well as supports that facilitated implementation.

Table 6.c. Key Themes on Implementation Barriers and Facilitators

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Late timing made outreach harder to carry out.	Stakeholders repeatedly said that materials, guidance, and final program information came too late. Once the school year ended, it was harder to reach families and harder to engage school staff who were no longer working.	“Our biggest challenge was starting after the school year ended.” – School staff “Information is needed no later than May 1.” – School staff “Anything they can share before the school year is out is more helpful. No later than May 1st.” – School staff
Eligibility and application rules were hard to explain.	Families and staff struggled with CEP-related confusion, different eligibility pathways within the same household, Medicaid-related assumptions, and how or where to apply.	“Understanding the S-EBT is income based rather than available to all students in CEP schools is challenging.” – School staff “Eligibility was confusing for families... more simplified explanation [is needed].” – School staff
Administrative problems weakened otherwise strong outreach.	Address mismatches, file upload errors, screener issues, call center confusion, and benefit fraud undermined outreach by creating frustration and extra follow-up.	“The school has the correct address, but DHS has a different address.” – State campaign partner “Not mobile friendly, which is how most families are accessing the application.” – School staff
Ready-to-use tools, training, and translation helped implementation.	Stakeholders consistently described toolkits, webinars, translated materials, and social media templates as helpful because they reduced staff burden and improved consistency.	“The Toolkit from NKH was great.” – School staff “We always love webinars and trainings.” – School staff “Translation services would be helpful.” – School staff

Qualitative insights on adaptations and innovations

Stakeholders also described adapting outreach strategies over time to better meet local needs and address implementation challenges. Findings highlight how teams refined messaging, tailored materials, and expanded outreach approaches based on ongoing learning.

Table 6.d. Key Themes on Adaptations and Innovations in Outreach Implementation

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Stakeholders tailored materials for local communities.	Districts and partners adapted materials by translating them into multiple languages, simplifying the reading level, adding QR codes, and customizing flyers and posts for local use.	"Flyers in English and Spanish were most used... most used additional languages were Swahili, Arabic, and Kinyarwanda." – School staff "[Our organization] took on the Marshallese translations." – State campaign partner "Created QR codes with materials with some tweaks, simplifying reading level, making sure it stood out." – School staff
Teams adjusted outreach based on what they learned during implementation.	Stakeholders refined messaging and delivery over time, for example by naming CEP schools directly in messages, shifting to boosted posts, creating FAQs, and identifying which staff and channels were best positioned to help families.	"CEP schools were the hardest to communicate with so we included the names of the CEP schools on communication to families." – School staff "This year... we tried boosted posts. It ended up being amazing." – State campaign partner
Outreach was expanded into more settings and touchpoints.	Some stakeholders moved beyond basic school outreach by using summer meal sites, libraries, churches, Boys and Girls Clubs, laundromats, job fairs, and city parks to reach families where they already were.	"Their staff was able to help additional families with SUN Bucks inquiries." – School staff "City parks, libraries, churches... partnering with those folks." – School staff

E. Maintenance

Maintenance findings reflect the anticipated sustainability of Summer EBT outreach strategies beyond the pilot period based on stakeholder perspectives. Across states, schools and partners expressed intent to continue outreach using existing communication channels, such as email, websites, and social media. Findings suggest that outreach is most sustainable when integrated into routine school communication systems and supported by accessible tools such as eligibility checkers and multilingual materials. However, stakeholders noted that long-term sustainability will depend on continued resources, improved accessibility, and broader policy and administrative conditions that shape program implementation.

Table 7.a. Key themes on Maintenance

THEME	DESCRIPTION	ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES
Partners plan to continue outreach, but at a lower intensity without funding.	Schools and partners intend to continue outreach through existing channels (email, websites, social media), but without dedicated funding or staff time, efforts will likely be more limited and less hands-on.	“We would still be able to market the program but with a more hands-off approach.” – School staff “We plan to continue our electronic messages, website posts, and social media posts.” – School staff “The grant helped to pay our contracted dietitian... Without the grant we would... be more hands off.” – School staff
Outreach is most sustainable when built into existing school communication systems.	Integrating Summer EBT outreach into routine school communications (during the school year, through existing platforms and staff roles) makes it easier to sustain over time.	“Ongoing communication while students are in session... especially at CEP schools.” – School staff
External factors may affect how much outreach can be sustained.	Sustainability will depend in part on broader policy, funding, and administrative conditions at the state and federal level.	“Don’t know what it’s going to do to this program.” – State campaign partner



V. LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Summer EBT Outreach and Communications Pilot generated a range of insights about what worked, what fell short, and what conditions are needed to sustain effective outreach at scale. The following lessons learned and recommendations reflect patterns observed across pilot states.

- **USE THE SCHOOL CALENDAR TO TIME COMMUNICATIONS.** Across states, stakeholders consistently identified late timing as one of the most significant barriers to outreach effectiveness, with materials and program guidance often arriving after the school year had ended. Outreach planning and family-facing communications should begin no later than May 1st, with key messages integrated into school communications throughout the academic year. Other opportunities for program outreach could be timed with back-to-school or when filling out alternative income forms or free and reduced price meal applications.

- POSITION STATE AGENCIES AS THE AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE OF INFORMATION.** Families, schools, and partners frequently encountered conflicting or incomplete information about eligibility, application requirements, and benefit issuance, contributing to confusion and eroding trust. As a best practice, State agencies could use existing resources to communicate clear, consistent and simplified guidance that partners and schools can use when fielding family questions.
- LEVERAGE SCHOOLS AS TRUSTED MESSENGERS.** School-based communications were the most commonly cited source of program awareness among surveyed parents, and school staff demonstrated strong willingness to conduct outreach when it fit into their existing workflows. Outreach strategies should be designed to integrate seamlessly into routine school communications, such as newsletters, emails, and robocalls.
- PROVIDE SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS WITH READY-TO-USE TOOLS AND CLEAR GUIDANCE.** Adoption was highest when partners had access to clear information about the program confirmed by the state, translated resources, and targeted training, reducing the burden on already stretched staff. Toolkits, social media templates, and webinars should be made available well in advance of the the end of the school year and tailored to local language and context needs. Clear information and program knowledge can help school staff feel confident answering parent questions.
- INVEST IN CROSS-PARTNER COLLABORATION TO EXPAND REACH.** Multi-partner coordination across state agencies, nonprofit organizations, school districts, and community organizations increased reach and helped fill gaps that no single entity could address alone. Formalizing coordination structures and sustaining funding for partner engagement will be important to maintaining outreach quality and consistency beyond the pilot period.
- SIMPLIFY CALLS TO ACTION AND REDUCE APPLICATION CONFUSION.** Although outreach efforts successfully raised awareness, a smaller share of parents reported being motivated to take action after seeing ads, and administrative barriers such as address mismatches further limited follow-through. Messaging should emphasize clear, simple next steps, and outreach should be paired with accessible application support to help families move from awareness to enrollment.
- PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY FROM THE START.** Stakeholders across states expressed intent to continue outreach using existing channels but anticipated reduced intensity without dedicated funding or staff support. Embedding Summer EBT outreach into existing school and partner communication systems is the most viable path to sustaining reach and effectiveness in future program years.
- WE RECOMMEND STATE AGENCIES USE THE OUTREACH PLAYBOOK FOR SUMMER EBT RESOURCES.** The strategies, findings, and recommendations documented in this report informed the development of [No Kid Hungry's Outreach Playbook For Summer EBT Resources](#), a practical resource designed to help State agencies plan and execute effective Summer EBT outreach. The playbook translates lessons learned from the pilot into actionable guidance on communications planning, partner coordination, school engagement, and digital outreach, grounded in what worked across Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, Michigan, and Nebraska. State agencies looking to strengthen their outreach infrastructure and reach more eligible families are encouraged to use the playbook alongside this report as a paired set of resources.