

# Summer EBT: Making the Program Work for Families

**RESOURCE FOR SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, AND PROGRAM PARTNERS — FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2025 NO KID HUNGRY CAREGIVER SURVEY**

## METHODOLOGY

In December 2025 and January 2026, No Kid Hungry surveyed 1,053 caregivers of school-age children (ages 5 - 18) in households with incomes consistent with free or reduced-price meal eligibility. This included 485 families who received Summer EBT in 2025, 112 families in Summer EBT states who did not, and 456 families in states that did not offer the program. The survey was available in English and Spanish. Results for participants and for families in non-offering states are weighted to be representative. The findings below highlight opportunities for partners to make Summer EBT/SUN Bucks more accessible and responsive to families' needs.



## KEY INSIGHTS BY STAKEHOLDER

### School And School District Staff

| WHAT FAMILIES TOLD US                                                                                                                                                                                                      | RECOMENDATIONS                                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Schools were the top information source for participating families (42%) and among their most trusted messengers (41%), but reached only 11% of non-participating families.                                                | Leverage state agency ready-to-use materials, such as templated social media posts, text messages, emails, and flyers.             |
| Checking a child's eligibility was the top information request for both participants (68%) and non-participants (67%); about half of non-participants who didn't apply didn't know about the program or their eligibility. | Promote any existing eligibility checkers and FAQ documents put out by the state agency.                                           |
| Among households that found 2025 easier than 2024, earlier eligibility notification was the top reason (54%).                                                                                                              | Time outreach after Spring Break and to the end of the school year. Families who heard earlier had a measurably better experience. |

### Community Organizations Conducting Outreach

| WHAT FAMILIES TOLD US                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | RECOMENDATIONS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Non-participating households were much less connected to assistance programs than participants (68% vs. 92%).                                                                                                                               | Carry Summer EBT information into networks that sit outside the benefits system. Non-participating families are less likely to be connected to any assistance program, which means agency-based outreach reaches fewer of them. Community organizations could reach individuals in person and through social media to help close that gap. |
| Non-participants most wanted to know what foods are allowed (54%) and where benefits can be used (48%). Not knowing benefits had expired was the top reason families left money unspent (46% of those who didn't spend their full benefit). | Help families answer the practical questions. What foods can be purchased, which stores accept the card, when benefits expire, and who to call. Point families to the state's FAQ where one is available, and let the state agency know what questions you're hearing most.                                                                |
| About half of income-eligible non-participants who didn't apply didn't know about the program or believed they weren't eligible.                                                                                                            | Advise caregivers to check the assumption that the program is for someone else. Families who rule themselves out never apply, refer them to an eligibility or enrollment checker. Trusted local voices are the most effective correction.                                                                                                  |

## Technology Partners And EBT Vendors

| WHAT FAMILIES TOLD US                                                                                                      | RECOMENDATIONS                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 6% of participating households had difficulty setting up their card or creating a PIN.                                     | Write card activation instructions in plain language, in multiple languages. PIN setup and activation are where families get stuck after the card arrives.                                                          |
| How to check a child's eligibility was the top information request for both participants (68%) and non-participants (67%). | Build eligibility and enrollment checkers that work on a phone. The highest-value tool a technology partner can deliver is one that tells a family whether their child is already enrolled or still needs to apply. |

