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June 12, 2020

The Honorable Tony Thurmond
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
1430 N Street, Suite 5602
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

We are writing to express our appreciation for all that the California Department of Education (CDE) has done to implement Pandemic-EBT (P-EBT). This program can provide critical food resources at a time when COVID-19 and the related economic fallout are putting California children in harm's way. We urge you to take action now to ensure that all eligible children will benefit from this program that is intended to prevent hunger and hardship among California's most vulnerable students.

P-EBT is a brand new program, making it unfamiliar to families, local educational authorities (LEA), and other education stakeholders throughout California. As organizations committed to fighting hunger so children have the food they need to learn, grow, and achieve at their fullest potential, we are doing all we can to promote P-EBT and support its success. But there is much more that must be done. Families need to hear from trusted sources, including school districts and education leaders, in order to increase awareness and acceptance of this program.

The need for awareness and acceptance is two-fold. First, families who automatically receive P-EBT cards for their children need reassurance that the benefits are legitimate. We are regularly hearing from parents who are concerned that the P-EBT cards they received in the mail are a scam designed to do harm. Second, families who must apply for P-EBT only have until June 30, 2020 or their children will be shut out of the program. Efficient, effective, and timely outreach is needed in order to reach the millions of families who must meet that looming deadline.

The COVID-19 crisis is increasing hardship throughout California. Families are struggling to access the food they need. A recent survey shows that from March to mid-May there was more than a 40 percent increase in adults living in households with children where there was “sometimes” or “often” not enough food to eat.

Past inequities in food access also persist during the current crisis with Black, Latinx, and low-income households being at greater risk for food insecurity, along with households that include children. A US Census Bureau survey conducted in mid-May shows that while 36 percent of California adults identify as Latinx, 60 percent of the adults in households that are experiencing food hardship identify as Latinx. Similarly, while six percent of California adults identify as Black, 14 percent of the adults in households that are experiencing food hardship identify as Black.

These devastating statistics reinforce what school nutrition professionals, educators, and education leaders across the state already know: children and their families need equitable access to more support. P-EBT can help, with most eligible children receiving \$365 in food benefits. Education leaders and the families they serve need to know that

- P-EBT is available to help families purchase food for their children, but getting P-EBT does not affect the eligibility of a family or a child to receive other nutrition services such as CalFresh, WIC, and meals being offered at schools or other community sites;
- P-EBT is available to children regardless of immigration status. Inclusive programs like P-EBT are especially important given that federal COVID-19 relief policies -- from direct cash payments to pandemic unemployment assistance -- have ignored many immigrant families; and
- The ability to apply for P-EBT benefits ends June 30, 2020.

We are hopeful that the State will request -- and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service will approve -- an extension of the application deadline. Whether or not such an extension is granted, timely, effective outreach is imperative.

We are deeply concerned that many LEAs have yet to share P-EBT program information with families. For instance, half of the school districts in San Diego County have yet to post information about P-EBT on their websites. Of those San Diego districts that are posting information about P-EBT, less than half are featuring the information on their homepages.

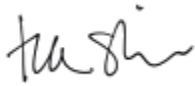
In order to reach all eligible children and their families before the application deadline, we respectfully request that you

- 1) Send a letter to all LEAs and education leaders throughout the state, including county and district superintendents and charter school administrators, strongly encouraging their promotion of P-EBT and proactive, targeted outreach to the children and families ahead of the June 30, 2020 application deadline; and

2) Broadly disseminate existing P-EBT education and outreach materials through social media, CDE listservs, and other channels to help equip LEAs with program information and sample outreach materials. We understand that the materials housed at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/home/pandemic-ebt> are soon to be updated, including the outreach toolkits intended for use by LEAs and community organizations.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to your response and the CDE's continued, timely efforts to connect children with much-needed P-EBT benefits.

With appreciation,



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