



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
**HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES**

JOSH STEIN • Governor

DEV DUTTA SANGVAI • Secretary

YVONNE COPELAND • Director, Division of Child and Family Well-Being

**Date:** May 5, 2026

**Attention:** County Directors of Social Services

**Subject:** 2026 North Carolina SUN Bucks (Summer EBT) – Benefit Issuance

**Priority:** Information for Awareness and Action

**Dear County Directors of Social Services:**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) SUN Bucks program returns for 2026 providing a one-time benefit of \$120 in food assistance on a debit-like EBT card for each qualifying student during the summer months when schools are out. In North Carolina, the SUN Bucks program is administered by the NC Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) in partnership with the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). As the 2026 SUN Bucks program ramps up, we want to share additional information about eligibility, benefit issuance, and resources available for promotion and the limited role of DSS staff this year.

**Eligibility**

Many students will automatically qualify for the SUN Bucks benefit, while others will need to apply. Families wishing to apply should visit the [NCDHHS SUN Bucks Homepage](#) for eligibility information and FAQs. There, families can also access the interactive eligibility quiz. Families are encouraged to take the [interactive eligibility quiz](#) to find out if their child may be eligible or if they should apply.

The following children are **automatically eligible** and **do not need to apply**:

- The child is enrolled in a National School Lunch Program ([NSLP](#)) school and they have an approved Free or Reduced-Price (FRP) meals application or were directly verified to receive FRP meals.
- A SUN Bucks application was submitted after July 1<sup>st</sup> last year and was approved. A new application for summer 2026 is not needed as long as the child is still enrolled in an NSLP/Community Eligibility Provision ([CEP](#)) participating school.
- The child is enrolled in a CEP school and participates in one of the programs listed below (regardless of age).

A child is also automatically eligible if they are between ages 7 and 16 at any point during the school year or the following summer, and they participate in at least one of the programs listed below:

- Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), **or**
- Work First, **or**
- Medicaid and has a household income of less than 185% of the federal poverty level, **or**
- Cherokee Tribal Food Distribution Program (CTFDP), **or**

- Child is in Foster Care, **or**
- Child is enrolled in the McKinney-Vento program (program for homeless youth)

Students not participating in any of these programs but who do attend an NSLP/CEP school and who meet income eligibility requirements can apply through the [SUN Bucks application website](#). Paper applications are available on the website to download; however, completing the application online is encouraged, as online applications are typically processed more quickly. Approved 2025 SUN Bucks applications (submitted between June 1 and August 31, 2025) will also confer 2026 eligibility, provided the child remains enrolled in an NSLP- or CEP-participating school. Others who wish to apply must do so by the August 15, 2026, deadline.

Resources about eligibility and application, including a SUN Bucks eligibility flyer in English or Spanish, can be found on the page. Additional information about the program, including frequently asked questions (FAQs), is available on the [NCDHHS SUN Bucks website](#).

**Issuances:** A one-time payment of \$120 per eligible child will be issued for the summer.

All eligible families will receive a new SUN Bucks card with specific information on how to activate and PIN the card. Card distribution begins in May and continues throughout the summer, with additional benefit cards mailed every two weeks through September as more children qualify.

Some households may receive their SUN Bucks card before benefits are available to use, as benefits typically begin being issued in mid-May, but benefits are not available until the summer period begins. Families are encouraged to be patient if they do not see their benefits immediately.

## DSS Role

Counties have a limited but specific role in helping eligible students receive their benefits this summer:

- **Children in foster care:** Cards will be mailed to the county DSS office. Foster care social workers are responsible for ensuring these children receive their cards and that the cards follow the child to each placement.
- **Households with DSS as their address:** These cards should be distributed in the same manner as other mail or cards received on behalf of households.

Households without a valid mailing address on file will be contacted by email, text message, or automated call and instructed to reach out to the SUN Bucks call center to provide an address for card delivery.

Follow your county's established procedures for handling the FNS undeliverable card report. Counties should not process any reports related to SUN Bucks cards, as NCDHHS manages undeliverable card reports for SUN Bucks-only cases.

Any remaining SUN Bucks cards from **2025** should not be distributed, as the benefits have expired. Clients may be advised to destroy old cards, as new cards will be issued for the **2026** benefit period. County DSS offices are **NOT** responsible for assisting clients with creating an activation code or PIN (personal identification number) for SUN Bucks cards. For assistance, clients should contact the North Carolina EBT Call Center at 1-866-719-0141, select their language, and choose option 2 to speak with a SUN Bucks representative.

## Resources

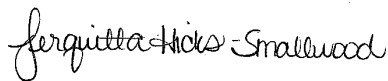
Please keep checking the NC SUN Bucks [Resources page](#) as items may be added or updated throughout the year.

- **Inform staff** about SUN Bucks benefits by directing them to [the SUN Bucks Resources page](#). **This page includes the following resources:**
  - Overview Flyer
  - Webinars
  - Eligibility Flyer
  - SUN Bucks Desk Reference
  - Memo for Child Welfare Staff
- **Inform families** of SUN Bucks benefits by sharing the following information:
  - [SUN Bucks Website](#)
  - [SUN Bucks Social Media](#)
  - [Flyers](#)
  - [SUN Bucks School Search Tool](#)
  - [Does my child qualify for SUN Bucks](#)

## General Information

SUN Bucks is part of North Carolina's Summer Nutrition Programs and aims to provide an easy and convenient way for students to access nutritious food over the summer. In addition to receiving SUN Bucks, families also are encouraged to have their children, ages 18 and younger, participate in other federal Summer Nutrition Programs available at no cost to them. Through SUN Meals, kids and teens can eat meals and snacks and engage in fun, fitness, and educational activities during the summer at schools, parks, camps, and other neighborhood locations. In rural areas where it may be difficult to access and participate in SUN Meals, SUN Meals To-Go may be available for pick up or delivery. Families can find more information at [SummerMeals4NCKids.org](http://SummerMeals4NCKids.org).

Sincerely,



Jerquitta Hicks-Smallwood  
Assistant Director  
Division of Child and Family Well-Being  
JHS/vj

EFS-FNSEP-07-2026



NC DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND  
HUMAN SERVICES

[ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks](http://ncdhhs.gov/sunbucks) • NCDHHS is an equal opportunity employer and provider • [USDA Non-Discrimination Statement](#)