

April 24, 2020

Superintendents,

We know that your time is valuable, and in an effort to streamline COVID-19 related information, we are consolidating our guidance and informational emails into one per week (unless, of course, an untimely emergency announcement should be necessitated). On April 8, we sent to you **ALSDE Academic and Technical Guidance** manual Appendix A. On April 16, we added **Appendix A/B**. Today's email includes **Appendix A/B/C**. Please review this updated information and also share it with your Central Office section coordinators and anyone else who would need it.

### **REOPENING CAMPUSES**

We have drafted the beginnings of a plan to re-open campuses for some summer activities as well as the return to classes in the fall. I use "drafted the beginnings" with caution as I am staying in close contact with public health officials and following the Governor's lead before releasing even a draft. Superintendents, however, are asking a lot of questions about summer and fall plans. At this time, I am just speaking with you all individually and helping you craft your own plans. We will need to issue some formal guidance very soon, and I have stressed this to all of our partners in Montgomery. By staying closely engaged, as soon as decisions are made about any public health orders beyond April 30, we will be ready to issue some additional guidance for schools within a matter of hours. ***Please remember, We are talking about June and beyond. We are not discussing returning to school in May, as that decision has already been made.*** At this time you should expect campuses, sports, activities to remain closed until June. The greatest number of inquiries regard graduation. I have serious reservations about holding even small graduation ceremonies at this time, but I am hopeful that ceremonies could be held in early June with limited attendance and special precautions – again that is my hope but we do not have clearance for any such activities yet. Many of you have seen the Gulfport (MS) High School graduation plan, which has been much retold in the national media, and have inquired about holding that type of event. As I understand it, Gulfport is allowing each senior to walk across the stage and pick up a diploma at a scheduled time with four family members present. They are filming each student and then plan to merge them into a seamless video. Some of you have begun planning events in a similar manner. Under our current health orders, even that would likely not be permissible because it would not be an essential activity; but I plan to run this idea by our Unified Command team this weekend. I think events like this will be allowable in the near future, but timing is everything. I will try to have some specifics by next Friday.

### **EBT CARDS**

The Department of Human Resources' (DHR) application to provide Pandemic Electronic Bank Transfers (P-EBT) for families who currently qualify for SNAP benefits has been approved. This includes an additional provision from USDA that allows families who qualify for Free or Reduced Price Lunches (F/RL) to get EBT cards even if they do not otherwise qualify for SNAP. ALSDE has provided the necessary information to DHR. It is not clear how quickly the actual financial transfers will take place. I am trying to make sure that media understand that while we support and applaud the effort, this is a DHR project and ALSDE is not directly engaged with USDA on this application. We will certainly do whatever we can to support DHR and look forward to the implementation on behalf of our students' families. DHR issued press release yesterday (see below).

### **ESSERF MONEY**

Yesterday, we received official notice from US Education Department (USED) Secretary Betsy DeVos that approximately \$216 million in CARES Act funding (also called ESSERF for Elementary and Secondary Schools Education Relief Fund) will be released within the next several days. We received the paperwork yesterday afternoon and we have submitted the state's application to USED today. These funds will require each local education agency (LEA) to submit an application. We expect the application to require a particular focus on items such as expenses directly related to COVID-19, remediation related to COVID-19, equitable services, and distance learning. Moreover, USED is requiring state education agencies (SEAs) to ensure that LEAs which receive ESSER funds provide equitable services to students and teachers in non-public schools located within an LEA in the same manner as required under Title I, Part A of ESEA. In addition to completing and submitting our SEA application and assurances, ALSDE is also currently working to prepare the LEA applications. You will be notified as soon as the LEA applications are available.

Mr. Craig is working on the financial structure. We are still awaiting answers to several procedural questions. Assuming all goes well with our application to the USED, we anticipate having the listing of allocations by LEA as well as the application out to you next week. Funds will begin to flow upon application approval. We will keep you informed on the progress.

### **BUDGET and LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

The Legislature is set to return on May 4, and the House is expected to take up the Education Trust Fund (ETF) budget as its first priority. We are continuing many conversations with the legislature this week, and I am pushing for K-12 to get its fair share of increases. In light of the current economic situation, many things remain unknown, but we do not expect a lost in teacher units, etc. There will be much more information forthcoming on the budget as we get closer. SSA is organizing a superintendents' call next week. I look forward to joining you with our first virtual meeting.

*Eric S. Mackey*

State Superintendent of Education

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Nancy T. Buckner  
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## **Alabama to Provide COVID-19 Pandemic Replacement Meal Benefits for Over 407,000 Alabama School Children**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday, April 23, 2020

MONTGOMERY, AL – The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) announced it has received initial approval by the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service to issue Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) benefits to eligible students in Alabama.

Under this program, an estimated 407,395 Alabama school children will have access to meals that normally would have been provided at school. Child nutrition remains a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic and state agencies are taking the necessary steps to ensure nutrition for the proper growth and development of Alabama children.

P-EBT benefits will be provided to households that have children in grades K-12 who have temporarily lost access to free or reduced-price school meals due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These benefits are designed to cover meals missed since the onset of statewide school closures on March 18th through the end of the school year on May 29th.

Alabama DHR Commissioner Nancy Buckner said, “We want to ensure that no Alabama child goes hungry during this time. The P-EBT program is essential to many in our state who depend on free or reduced meals at school to feed their children. We are pleased that the USDA Food and Nutrition Service has initially approved

our request to provide these benefits and we are working to get these funds distributed as soon as possible. We are also extremely thankful to Dr. Eric Mackey and his staff for working with us on this very important project. School districts across Alabama have done an exceptional job to ensure that children have access to nutritional meals while our schools are closed due to COVID-19; and, these P-EBT benefits will give children and families more support for nutritious, healthy food.”

The P-EBT program includes current Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients, as well as any other children who are eligible for a free or reduced-price meal at school.

The program allows children to receive benefits equal to the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP) reimbursement rates, which is \$5.70 per day, per child. Eligible households will receive benefits retroactively for the months of March, April, and May.

Benefits will first be distributed to existing eligible SNAP recipients via the household’s Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. No application is required. DHR will also coordinate with the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) to identify eligible households who do not already participate in SNAP; those households will receive Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards with benefits beginning in May.

Households that would normally be considered ineligible for SNAP due to the household’s income will receive a P-EBT letter notifying them of eligibility and program provisions. These households may then verify their information provided by ALSDE and elect to participate in the P-EBT program. Households that choose to participate will be issued an EBT card and other pertinent information regarding EBT card use and choosing a Personal Identification Number (PIN).

DHR plans to issue most P-EBT benefits in May for the months of March, April and May.

P-EBT benefits will allow households to receive an estimated (per child): \$68.40 for March, \$125.40 for April, and \$119.70 for May, depending on the family’s eligibility for free and reduced-price meals.

Children may continue to access meals distributed by local school districts while receiving P-EBT benefits.

The P-EBT benefits are active for 365 days from the date of issuance and are non-transferable.

P-EBT benefits may be used at any store that accepts SNAP and can be used to purchase SNAP eligible food items.

The Department is pleased that USDA Food and Nutrition Service has given Alabama the opportunity to assist more than 400,000 Alabama school children and their families.

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