

CALPADS Update Flash #321



Date: February 18, 2026

To: Local Educational Agency (LEA) Representatives

From: California Department of Education (CDE) – CALPADS Team

Summer 2026 SUN Bucks

This Flash provides an overview of California’s implementation of the 2026 SUN Bucks program. The primary change for the 2026 program year is that 3 percent of approved Universal Benefits Applications (UBAs) received by April 1, 2026 must be selected for verification before data are submitted to the CDE through the Education Data Collection System (EDCS). To meet this new requirement, EDCS will open on April 2, 2026.

When is the 2026 SUN Bucks Eligibility Period?

The 2026 SUN Bucks Eligibility Period is **July 1, 2025 – August 31, 2026**.

What are the SUN Bucks Eligibility Criteria?

The 2026 SUN Bucks eligibility criteria are the same as last year. For both Streamlined Certified and Non-Streamlined Certified students, SUN Bucks eligibility criteria must be met at any point during the eligibility period. The criteria for Streamlined Certified and Non-Streamlined Certified students are as follows:

Streamlined Certified Students: California students ages 6–18 years old are automatically eligible for SUN Bucks if they meet one of the following criteria during the eligibility period, regardless of whether they are enrolled in a school that participates in a federal meals program:

- Participate in CalFresh, CalWORKs, or Medi-Cal at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), or
- Are categorically eligible based on their homeless, migrant, or foster youth status.

These *students*:

1. Do not need to be enrolled in a school participating in a federal meals program, and
2. Do not need to submit Universal Benefits Applications (UBAs) or National School Lunch Program (NSLP) meal applications.

LEAs do not have to submit any additional data to the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement System (**CALPADS**) for these students beyond the enrollment and program records that they already submit and maintain in CALPADS. For SUN Bucks specifically, it is important for LEAs to keep education program records for homeless students and student addresses up to date in CALPADS.

Please note that LEAs **do not need to submit students who have been directly certified (DC) through CALPADS to EDCS**, as these students have already been identified for eligibility in CALPADS. *Some* LEAs conduct an additional local direct certification process with their county welfare department, and through that local process may identify additional students who are participating in CalFresh or CalWORKS that were *not* identified through the statewide DC matching process conducted by CALPADS. LEAs may send local direct certification records to EDCS for these students so that they may receive SUN Bucks benefits. If your LEA does not conduct such a process, you will have no students who are locally directly certified. In addition, LEAs that extend benefits to students based on others in the household participating in CalFresh or CalWORKS may send extended benefits records to EDCS for these students so that they may receive SUN Bucks benefits.

Non-Streamlined Certified Students: Students who are *not* Streamlined Certified may be eligible for SUN Bucks benefits if *they attend a school participating in a federal meals program during the eligibility period and they:*

- Are ages 0–22 and have an approved UBA or NSLP application on file during the eligibility period.

For Non-Streamlined Certified students, LEAs must submit records for students with approved UBAs or NSLP applications to EDCS. Note that records submitted to EDCS require a Statewide Student Identifier (SSID).

Submitting Data to EDCS

LEAs will continue to submit certain SUN Bucks-related data to EDCS that are not specifically collected in CALPADS. This includes records for Non-Streamlined Certified students who establish eligibility through UBAs or NSLP applications and students identified as eligible through a local direct certification or extended benefits process.

The submission of these records to EDCS will change for the 2026 administration of SUN Bucks, as described below.

- **LEAs must resend a subset of records they uploaded for 2025 SUN Bucks:** LEAs must submit all students who are eligible July 1, 2025 through August 31, 2026. This means that LEAs must *resend* students who were eligible July 1, 2025 through September 2, 2025, even if such records were previously uploaded to EDCS for 2025 SUN Bucks.
- **LEAs submit only new students in each file uploaded to EDCS:** Last year, LEAs uploaded full replacement files to EDCS. This meant that each file uploaded to EDCS fully replaced the previous file and was supposed to include all students sent in previous files, as well as any new students. In 2026, LEAs will only need to send new students each time a file is uploaded to EDCS. If an LEA inadvertently sends records for students they previously uploaded, the CDE will deduplicate those records.
- **LEAs must immediately inform the CDE of any erroneous records:** If an LEA submits any records in error (e.g., ineligible students are submitted), it is absolutely critical that the LEA inform the CDE immediately so that the CDE can remove any erroneous records before those students are exported to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) for benefits issuance. In cases where student records have already been exported and sent to CDSS, the CDE must work with CDSS to take corrective action and address the erroneous issuance of benefits to ineligible students.
- **LEAs create one verification pool:** For 2026 Sun Bucks, LEAs create one verification pool and must verify 3 percent of all approved UBAs submitted September 3, 2025 through April 1, 2026. UBAs submitted April 2, 2026 through June 30, 2026 are only verified for cause (i.e., verifying any questionable application for cause), while UBAs submitted July 1, 2026 through August 31, 2026 will be part of the 2027 SUN Bucks verification pool. Note that UBAs submitted July 1, 2025 through September 2, 2025 were part of the rolling verification process conducted for the 2025 SUN Bucks administration, and those UBAs must not be included in the 2026 SUN Bucks verification pool.

Upload records to EDCS as early as possible

EDCS opens on April 2, 2026 and closes on September 30, 2026 at 5:00 p.m. Note that this window is shorter than in 2025, in order to support federal requirements. LEAs should upload records to EDCS as early as possible during this window so that students receive their benefits in the summer.

When EDCS opens, LEAs should be able to upload to EDCS during the month of April:

- All approved UBAs submitted July 1, 2025 through April 1, 2026 except those that are part of the April 1, 2026 3 percent verification sample; and
- All approved NSLP applications, local direct certification, and extended benefits, with dates on or after July 1, 2025.

Prior to each monthly data pull from EDCS, LEAs should continue to upload records for newly approved or verified UBAs, newly approved NSLP applications, as well as any students newly identified through local direct certification or extended benefits processes.

LEAs should expect to upload more records in July and August for students enrolling in a California public school for the first time, particularly students entering transitional kindergarten or kindergarten, because these students would not have been able to submit UBAs or NSLP meal applications during the 2025–26 school year. With the shorter submission window, it is important for LEAs to process UBAs submitted by families in late August as soon as possible, so that the records can be uploaded to EDCS before the September 30, 5:00 p.m. deadline. Note again that approved UBAs submitted between July 1, 2026 and August 31, 2026 are not subject to 2026 SUN Bucks verification before they are uploaded to EDCS. These applications will be part of the verification pool from which a 3 percent sample will be selected on April 1, 2027.

What dates will data be pulled from CALPADS and EDCS for SUN Bucks?

Data will be pulled from CALPADS and EDCS at the close of business (5:00 p.m.) on the last business day of each month. CALPADS data will be pulled from CALPADS, February 2026 to September 2026, and from EDCS, April 2026 to September 2026. Table 1 below displays the specific dates that data will be pulled from CALPADS and EDCS.

Table 1: Data Pull Dates for CALPADS and EDCS

Data are pulled on the last business day of the month, at the close of business (5 p.m.) onfrom CALPADS	...from EDCS
February 27, 2026	Yes	No
March 31, 2026	Yes	No
April 30, 2026	Yes	Yes
May 29, 2026	Yes	Yes

Data are pulled on the last business day of the month, at the close of business (5 p.m.) onfrom CALPADS	...from EDCS
June 30, 2026	Yes	Yes
July 31, 2026	Yes	Yes
August 31, 2026	Yes	Yes
September 30, 2026	Yes	Yes

Must 181/182 program records be submitted to CALPADS to identify students eligible for SUN Bucks?

No. LEAs submit Free and Reduced-Price Meal (FRPM) program records (181/182) to CALPADS based on students with approved UBAs, NSLP applications, Alternative Income Forms (AIFs), as well as for local direct certification and extended benefits. Since AIFs do not meet federal requirements for determining SUN Bucks eligibility, the 181/182 record cannot be used to identify students eligible for SUN Bucks. As a result, EDCS will be used to collect the data necessary to determine students eligible for SUN Bucks based on applications, local direct certification, and extended benefits. However, LEAs should continue to submit 181/182 records to CALPADS (based on approved UBAs, NSLP applications, AIFs, etc.) for Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) purposes and to identify students as FRPM eligible for other funding, reporting, and accountability student group purposes.

Resources

Flash 297 – Revised: Refer to CALPADS Update Flash #297 on the CDE’s website (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sp/cl/calpadsupdf/flash297b.asp>) for additional background information, including:

- What is a Universal Benefits Application (UBA)?
- Who must submit a UBA or NSLP Application?
- Which application must students submit to be eligible for SUN Bucks? Can we use Alternative Income Form (AIF)?
- Application Type Required Based on Participation Model

EDCS and the Supplemental SUN Bucks Data Collection (SSBC): Note that the CDE EDCS web page (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/dc/edcs.asp>) and the CDE SSBC Data Collection Instructions web page (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/dc/ssbcinstruct.asp>) are currently being updated to reflect changes described in this Flash.

The CDE has a SUN Bucks web page (<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/nu/sunbucks.asp>) with resources geared towards LEAs.

The CDSS provides resources via the SUN Bucks web page (<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/sun-bucks>) and outreach materials on the SUN Bucks Resources web page (<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/sun-bucks/partners>) for SUN Bucks partners.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has developed a SUN Bucks outreach toolkit for use on their website (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/summer/toolkit>). The outreach toolkit includes video, facts sheets, and customizable resources in a variety of languages to inform households about SUN Bucks and how to use their benefits.

Contact Information

For household questions, the CDSS has a customer service helpline: (877) 328-9677. General information about SUN Bucks can be found at the CDSS SUN Bucks web page at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/sun-bucks>.

For LEA questions ONLY, please reach out to SummerEBT@cde.ca.gov. This email address is not for household inquiries about SUN Bucks.

For CALPADS questions, please send a ticket to calpads-support@cde.ca.gov.

For EDCS questions, please send an email to educationdatacollection@cde.ca.gov

For questions about the Alternative Income Form and the Local Control Funding Formula, please send an email to PASE@cde.ca.gov.

For general questions about the School Nutrition programs, please send an email to SNPInfo@cde.ca.gov.