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Evaluation of Summer EBT Project Non-Participant Parent/Caregiver Interviews

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for joining us today. My name is [*lead visitor*], and this is [*junior visitor*]. We also have [*IT person*] joining us to help with any technology issues or concerns. We work for Abt Associates, a company hired by the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Food and Nutrition Service to do research on Summer EBT, a benefit that provides income support to help eligible families purchase nutritious foods.

Now, we just need to get consent from you to participate in the interview. First, we want you to know that whatever you say to us will be private. That means, while we might use the information you provide, your name will never be revealed in any report or any discussion with anyone. Nothing you say here today will ever be connected with your name. While we intend to record the interview and take notes, the recording and notes will not be shared with anyone outside of the study team except as otherwise required by law. After our research is completed, we will delete the recording.

Second, there are no right or wrong answers. We want to learn about your experiences and opinions.

Third, we know you are busy; we expect the discussion will be approximately 15 minutes. As a thank-you for your participation today, we will provide you with a \$25 gift card. We'll provide details at the end of our conversation.

Last, if you have any questions or comments about this interview, please contact me directly or the school district liaison, [*name of liaison*], who helped organize this interview.

Do you have any questions for us? [*Answer questions*]
Do you agree to participate? [*Wait for response*]

Ok, great. I want to be sure I am keeping track of everything you say. May I record our discussion so that I can listen to it later when I write up my notes? [*If YES*]: Thank you; [*If NO*]: That's no problem. We'll take notes as you talk, but I may sometimes need to ask you to slow down or repeat so that I can get all the information.

Ok. I'd like to start with an explanation of the purpose of this discussion. We are here today because your child – or children – qualified for the Summer EBT benefit this year. All children in your school district that received subsidized meals at school were eligible to participate in the Summer EBT program this past summer, but our understanding is that your household did not participate.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is conducting this study to obtain information about the experiences of the Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Project by grantees, retailers, school districts and participants. Participation in this study is voluntary and the information collected will be used to understand how Summer EBT projects are implemented in varying settings. According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 0584-0524. The time required to provide this information collection is estimated to average 30 minutes per response, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources, gather and maintain the data needed, and complete and review the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to: USDA/Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Policy Support, 1320 Braddock Place, 5th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314 ATTN: PRA (0584-0524).

[For active sites] By that, we mean you did not apply for the benefit, or you did complete the application but chose not to activate and/or redeem Summer EBT benefits.

[For passive sites] By that, we mean you should have received a benefit card from **[Insert grantee]**, but records show that you did not redeem any of the benefits available to you.

Just to be clear, when we talk about Summer EBT, we're talking about a program run by **[Insert grantee]** that provides children with a food package benefit—valued at about ~\$30-45 (*\$30 base plus the cash voucher amount for the grantee site*) per month per child—during the summer months. Children who received free or subsidized meals during the school year are eligible for the summer benefit, which is provided on a Summer EBT card.

[Describe card]

A.1 Were you aware of the Summer EBT program before our liaison from **[Insert school district]** contacted you about this interview?

In passive sites, probe for:

a) *Do you remember receiving a benefit card like the one I described from **[Insert grantee]**?*

[If the respondent is aware of the program, continue to A.2. Otherwise, skip to A.3]

A.2 How and when did you hear about Summer EBT?

Probe for:

a) *From whom did they receive info: child's school, community group, a friend who uses the program, other*

b) *How did they receive info: email, text, flyers from school/grantee, social media, word of mouth, other*

A.3 How do you normally hear about programs like Summer EBT?

A.4 Have you participated in programs like this in the past?

Probe for:

a) SNAP

b) WIC

c) Pandemic EBT

A.5 If you were in charge of a program that offered families \$30 worth of food in summer months, like Summer EBT, how would you make sure families knew about the program?

Probe for:

d) *Clarify language in outreach and marketing materials*

e) *Use alternative communication channels (e.g., in-person sign-up events, other social media)*

f) *Choose different time of day to reach someone with information about Summer EBT*

g) *Choose different time of year to receive information on Summer EBT*

h) *Rely on a different agency/organization to contact potential participants – schools?*

[If respondent was not aware of the program at question A.1, skip to A.16. Otherwise, continue to A.6]

A.6 When you heard about the program, did you know that you qualified? If you completed an application, why did you choose to not redeem benefits?

[If respondents did not think they were eligible, continue to A.7. Otherwise, skip to A.9.]

A.7 Why did you think that your family did not qualify? **[In passive sites...]** What did you think when you received the card?

Probe for:

- a) Assumed it was available to native families only
- b) Family income too high
- c) Already receive other benefits
- d) Not usually eligible for these kinds of programs
- e) Children participate in other summer nutrition programs

A.8 What information could have been provided to make it more clear that your family qualified?

Probe for:

- a) Customer service number to call with eligibility questions
- b) Clearer information on income eligibility requirements

A.9 When you heard about the program, how interested were you in participating, and what did you think participating would be like?

[If respondents did not know they were eligible in A.6, skip to A.16.]

Ok, since you knew you qualified, we would like to ask a few questions about the fact that you did not participate.

[For active sites] Meaning you did not apply for the benefit.

[For passive sites] Meaning you did not redeem any of the benefits available to you.

A.10 Recognizing that you were eligible, did you choose not to participate out of personal preference?

A.11 What were your reasons for not participating?

Probe for:

- a) Embarrassed or uncomfortable
- b) Thought other families would have less benefit available to them
- c) Children do not like the items in the food package
- d) Family did not need the benefit
- e) Forgot to apply/use the card and didn't get reminders
- f) Dissatisfaction with these kinds of benefit programs
- g) Fear of shopping in person due to COVID

[In active sites, ask A.12, skip A.13, then continue with A.14. In passive, sites skip A.12, ask A.13, then continue with A.14.]

A.12 Did you encounter any problems with the application process that prevented you from applying?

Probe for:

- a) Phone or internet access issues
- b) Lack of time to complete application
- c) Difficult to understand the application
- d) Unwilling to share required information
- e) Prefer a paper application

A.13 Did you encounter any problems with using the card that prevented you from redeeming any benefits?

Probe for:

- a) Card failed to work in the store
- b) Difficult to understand how the card worked
- c) Could not activate the card
- d) Lack of transportation to eligible stores

A.14 What could be changed about the program to make it more likely for you to participate in the future?

[Phrase this question to emphasize ease of participation or willingness to participate, as appropriate.]

Attachment F.4 Summer EBT_2022 Non-participant Interview Protocol

Probe for:

- a) More store options (i.e., closer stores or different types of stores)*
- b) Food package item mix*
- c) Online shopping options*
- d) More information about using benefits (e.g., eligible products)*
- e) More flexibility in benefit use, like rolling over across months (Cherokee only)*

A.15 What about in your life – are there things you would need to make it easier to participate?

Probe for:

- a) Transportation*
- b) Childcare*
- c) Time*

A.16 If you were in charge of a program that provides financial support to help parents meet their kids' nutritional needs during the summer - like Summer EBT - what would you want that program to be like?

A.17 How likely are you to participate in Summer EBT in the future?

A.18 Is there anything else that you would want to share that we did not cover today?

Thank you for your time and helpful feedback. Are there any questions for me before we finish?

END OF INTERVIEW