

GENERAL INFORMATION SYSTEM
Center for Employment and Economic Supports

October 14, 2009

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TO: Commissioners; TA Directors; FS Directors; WMS Coordinators; CAP/TOP Coordinators;
Staff Development Coordinators

FROM: Russell Sykes, Deputy Commissioner, Center for Employment and Economic Supports

SUBJECT: Resolution of Potentially Eligible Households for the 2009 Back-to-School One-Time Payment

EFFECTIVE DATE: Immediately

CONTACT PERSON: Temporary Assistance Bureau at 1-800-343-8859, extension 4-9344

The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) issued a one-time non-assistance payment in August 2009 to defray the back-to-school costs for low-income New York households with children aged three through 17 eligible for temporary assistance (TA) and/or food stamp (FS) during the month of July 2009. A notice advised recipients of this payment to purchase such items as books, pencils, pens, notebooks, calculators, backpacks, shoes, school uniforms, pants, skirts, dresses and other essential clothes and school items.

The back-to-school payments are part of the federal TANF Emergency Contingency Fund (TECF) that was enacted as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The TECF has only limited allowable purposes, all of which are aimed at providing assistance to low-income households. One of these purposes is to provide low-income families with non-recurring one time payments such as the back-to-school payments. By working in a unique partnership with a private donor, New York was able to leverage \$140 million in federal money. There was absolutely no possibility for using these funds for other fiscal relief. There was and will continue to be no local share for the cost of the one-time back-to-school payments or for the associated Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) issuance cost.

To assist districts in determining if all eligible low-income New Yorkers received this payment, OTDA will provide districts with a list of potentially eligible cases in which children appear eligible for the one-time only non-assistance payment made to eligible households on August 11, 2009, and who have not received a back-to-school payment as of October 16, 2009.

OTDA provided districts with an Exception Report for the initial pull-down that included those cases in which the case on the date of the pull-down (7/24/09):

- was in pending status;
- had no available payment line; or
- was closed.

Although OTDA instructed districts to review the lists generated by the Exception Report, these lists could not include certain cases. These were cases in which the applicant for TA or FS did not appear in an active TA or FS case on WMS on 7/24/09, but were determined by the district as eligible for TA or FS for the month of July 2009.

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As a reminder, to be eligible for the one-time back-to-school payment:

- The child must have been age three through 17 on August 1, 2009, regardless of the child's relationship to the head of household; and
- The child must have been active or sanctioned on either an Active TA or an Active FS case at any time during July 2009.

Many districts authorized back-to-school payments to eligible cases regardless of whether the case appeared on the Exception Report. Therefore, the list of potentially eligible households described below excludes any case that received a back-to-school payment identified as an "N4-Back to School" (BK-2-SCH) Payment Type prior to 10/17/09.

After confirming their eligibility and as yet unpaid status, districts must review the eligibility status of these cases for possible duplication in relation to other cases, and to assure that no prior issuance of an "N4" payment occurred after the creation of the list. Districts must use the attached letters (Spanish and English versions attached) without modifying the text but filling in the "General Telephone No. for Questions or Help" section of the letter with a local district phone number, when authorizing back-to-school payments to these TA and FS cases appearing on this list. No mass issuance of payments will occur. To avoid unnecessary inquiries, districts should complete and mail this notice to recipients of the payments a few days prior to the point when the payment posts to the recipient's EBT account.

Again, the following remains true for these additional back-to-school payments as for the original payments authorized on August 11, 2009. The payment will:

- have no effect on the household's eligibility or benefit amount for TA, FS, MA or HEAP;
- not be part of regular recurring TA grant;
- be excluded from the TA standard of need;
- be excluded as income to the TA and FS household;
- be excluded from TA and FS resource limits;
- be excluded from the State 60-month time limit;
- not be offset by child support collections;
- not offset TA overpayments;
- not be subject to overpayment determinations/calculations;
- not be included in Interim Assistance Reimbursement (IAR).

Districts must authorize back-to-school payments for those cases appearing on this list within 30 days of the receipt of this list. Districts should continue to authorize back-to-school payments based on requests from eligible households that did not receive these payments prior to the issuance of this list, and not wait for the generation of the list. The list is a tool to identify potentially eligible households. There is no requirement to call the individuals on this list in for a face-to-face interview when determining eligibility for the back-to-school payment.

As with the original back-to-school payments, recipients of the back-to-school payments have a minimum of 90 days from the date of benefit availability on EBT to access the funds. Districts should encourage clients to access their EBT cash account within 90 days, as benefits will begin to be expunged if the client's cash account is not accessed within 90 consecutive days of cash benefit availability.

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The notices remind Food Stamp-only households that they can access the back-to-school payment using the same card and PIN that they use for their Food Stamp benefits. If households in receipt of a back-to-school payment contact their district office to request a replacement CBIC card because the magnetic stripe on their CBIC has been damaged, districts should issue a replacement CBIC to that household following the usual CBIC replacement issuance procedures.

Rest of State (ROS) System Specifications:

A list of cases, potentially eligible for back-to-school payments, is tentatively scheduled to be sent to districts on October 21, 2009. Districts will receive a WMS GIS informing them of the issuance of those lists, including the File Name and format prior to its scheduled release.

This list will capture potentially eligible TA and FS households with eligible children who became active between 7/25/09-07/31/09. The cases on this report must have the payments authorized at the local level as described in the July 31, 2009 Dear WMS Coordinator letter.