VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

SNAP Community Engagement

Connecting Communities, Nourishing Futures: SNAP Engagement from Schools to Summer

Dwronyel Price & Iesha Darden

SNAP USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
Putting Healthy Food Within Reach

VIRGINIA SUN BUCKS

WHAT WE'LL COVER

Agenda

Click any section below to jump straight there. Every slide links back here via the "◂ Agenda" tag in the bottom corner.

01 The Challenge
Why food insecurity matters for Virginia's kids ›

02 SNAP Community Engagement
The programs behind the mission ›

03 SNAP IN SCHOOLS
Vision, pathway, pillars &momentum ›

04 Virginia SUN Bucks
2026 benefit details, timeline &reach ›

05 How You Can Help
Action items for workers &leadership ›

THE CHALLENGE

Too Many Virginia Families Are Going Hungry

Food insecurity is a direct barrier to a child's health, attendance, and academic success and the need reaches every corner of the Commonwealth.

463,000+

Virginia children live in households likely eligible for SNAP

1 in 2

Virginia children experience food insecurity (Feeding America)

638,000+

Virginia children received Virginia SUN Bucks last summer

Sources: Annie E. Casey Foundation; Feeding America; Virginia Department of Social Services

OUR PROGRAM

SNAP Community Engagement: More Than Food Benefits

Through partnerships with schools, local organizations, and community groups, SNAP Community Engagement connects Virginia families to the resources that support work, education, and wellness meeting people where they are and building on their strengths.

WIC

Women, Infants & Children

Farmers Markets

SNAP at Farm Market Fresh sites

School-Based Nutrition

Including National School Lunch Program & SNAP IN SCHOOLS

Virginia Sun Bucks

$120 for every eligible school aged child during the Summer

Outreach Partners

Community & faith-based agencies

Two flagship initiatives anchor this work for Virginia's school-aged children: SNAP in Schools and Virginia SUN Bucks.

PART ONE

SNAP IN SCHOOLS

Together, we're not just connecting families to benefits. We're helping build brighter futures, one school, one family, and one child at a time.

A Clear Vision, A Focused Mission

VISION

Every child in Virginia has reliable access to nutritious food, empowering them to learn, grow, and succeed both in and out of the classroom.

MISSION

To connect eligible families with SNAP through school-based partnerships, targeted outreach, and streamlined access to nutrition programs.

SUPPORTING GOALS

- Increase awareness of SNAP & nutrition programs
- Strengthen state, school, and community collaboration
- Expand SNAP outreach through schools & partners
- Integrate enrollment with Direct Certification

One Enrollment. Two Benefits. Year-Round Support.

1

Family Enrolls in SNAP

Through CommonHelp, a local DSS office, or a school-based outreach event.

2

Automatic Eligibility

Children on SNAP are automatically eligible no separate Sun Bucks application required.

3

Virginia SUN Bucks Unlocked

A summer grocery benefit is loaded onto a benefits card, issued on a rolling basis through the summer.

FAST FACT Benefits are issued on a rolling basis through the summer as applications are received and processed the sooner a family enrolls, the sooner they're covered.

Four Pillars Driving Sustainable Impact

Outreach & Awareness

Family-friendly messaging across school channels, social media, and community events.

Enrollment & Access

Promote CommonHelp and on-site application support to remove barriers to benefits.

Partnerships & Engagement

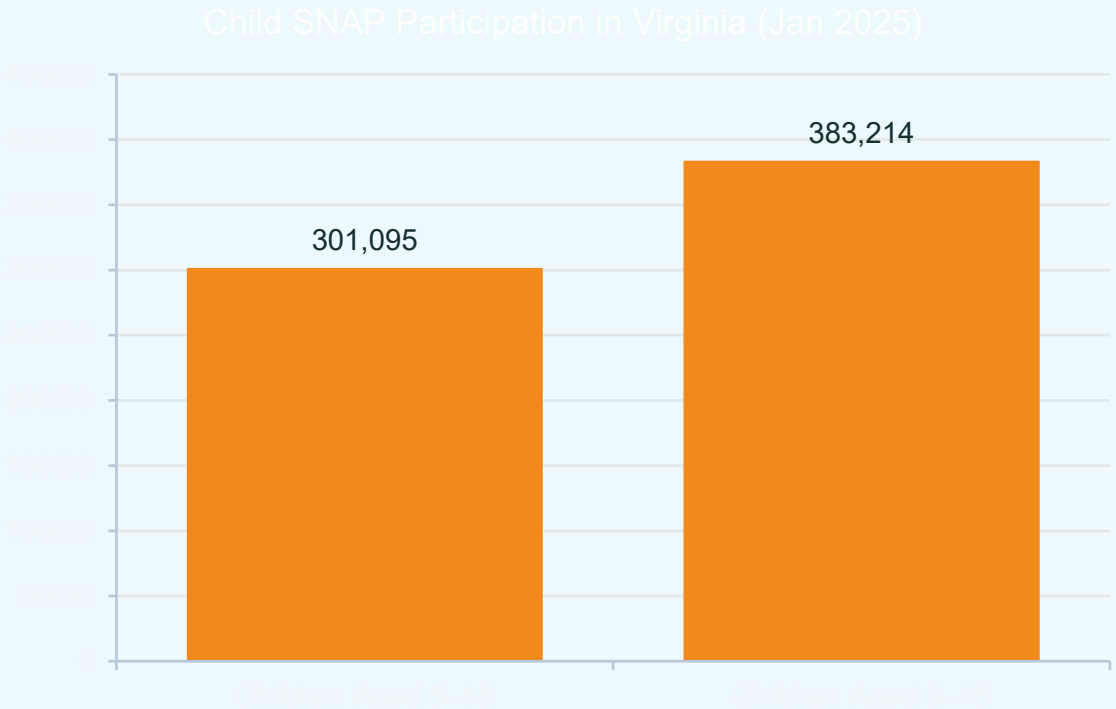
Build ties with school divisions, libraries, and community organizations.

Impact & Alignment

Strengthen ties between SNAP, Direct Certification, and Virginia SUN Bucks.

BY THE NUMBERS

From a Single Pilot to Statewide Reach



1
Pilot launch: Dinwiddie County, 7 schools

29
School districts engaged statewide

4,200+
Students reached through targeted outreach

The work is already Happening!

PART TWO

Virginia SUN Bucks

Summer EBT ending the summer hunger gap for Virginia's school-aged children

A $120 Summer Grocery Benefit for Every Eligible Child

Virginia SUN Bucks helps eligible families cover groceries during summer break, when school meals aren't available. In 2026, each eligible school-age child receives a one-time $120 benefit, loaded onto an existing SNAP EBT card or a new Virginia SUN Bucks card mailed home.

Automatically Enrolled

✓ School-age children in households receiving SNAP, TANF, or income-based Medicaid

✓ Children approved for free or reduced-price school meals during the most recently completed school year (NSLP)

No application needed benefits arrive automatically.

Must Apply

Families not already enrolled in SNAP, TANF, or income-based Medicaid and whose child did not receive free or reduced-price meals through NSLP should apply at virginiasunbucks.com or by mail.

~85% of eligible children are enrolled automatically, with no application required.

How Families Get It and When

May 2027

Mailed and online applications review begins.

May – August 2027

Call Center live at 866-513-1414; Phone Applications open.

May 2027

Benefits begin issuing on a rolling basis as applications process.

August 31, 2027

Final day to apply for 2027 SUN Bucks benefits.

Confirm your address. Families already on SNAP receive benefits on their existing EBT card. Everyone else gets a new Virginia SUN Bucks card mailed to the address on file with their school or local department of social services so an accurate mailing address prevents delays.

Preventing Summer Hunger, Statewide

638,000+

Virginia children received Virginia SUN Bucks last summer

~85%

Of eligible children enrolled automatically no application needed

$120

One-time grocery benefit per eligible school-age child in 2026

VDSS Commissioner Duke Storen has framed the effort simply: preventing summer hunger keeps kids healthy, safe, and ready to learn and VDSS is committed to reaching every eligible child in Virginia.

Reaching Every Family, Every Channel

Digital

Email blasts, text alerts, social media, robocalls, Google ads, 211 Virginia.

Print

Flyers, magnets, yard signs, posters, and benefit notices.

In-Person

Registration events, PTA meetings, field days, community resource fairs.

Every audience gets the right message: families, schools, and administrators each receive tailored messaging on streamlined access, fewer applications, and easier referrals across SNAP in Schools and Virginia SUN Bucks alike.

See Virginia SUN Bucks in Action

A quick video overview to help local staff understand the program and confidently connect families with summer nutrition support.

Introducing Virginia SUN Bucks

Watch this short overview before we move into local action.

WATCH VIDEO ▶

HOW YOU CAN HELP

A Hunger-Free Future for Virginia's Kids

For Benefits Workers

- Flag SNAP, TANF & Medicaid status early it drives automatic SUN Bucks and school-meal enrollment
- Remind families to confirm their mailing address for card delivery
- Share SNAP in Schools materials with school and community partners
- Refer families to CommonHelp and virginiasunbucks.com

For Leadership

- Support statewide expansion beyond current school districts
- Champion interagency data-sharing agreements
- Help launch the SNAP in Schools Advisory Board
- Invest in year-round, cross-program outreach capacity

foodconnections.dss.virginia.gov • virginiasunbucks.com

Thank You for Supporting Virginia Families

Your partnership helps connect children and families to SNAP, Virginia SUN Bucks, and the nutrition resources they need to thrive.

We Value Your Feedback

Please complete the brief survey. Your feedback will help strengthen future outreach, training, and local engagement.

SCAN TO COMPLETE THE SURVEY

Or click here to open the survey

Together, we can make access easier.