

SMART Funds Information Session Transcript: August 2, 2022

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Yearwood, Shannon

Hi, everyone. We're gonna wait till 2:00 o'clock on the dot to get started.

0:0:4.790 --> 0:0:6.70

Yearwood, Shannon

Thanks for joining us today.

0:0:44.310 --> 0:1:19.180

Yearwood, Shannon

Hi everybody. I'm Shannon Yearwood with the Connecticut State Department of Education. And I am so incredibly excited to have you join us for our school meals assistance revenue for transition funds information session. This is being recorded and it is also having a transcription generated. So please be aware of that we do not have your cameras or your mic's turned on, so certainly go ahead and enter any questions that you have in the chat box today. We will not be answering the Q and A, but what we are doing is developing a second set of questions and answers and another.

0:1:19.260 --> 0:1:34.430

Yearwood, Shannon

Information session training. So we need to know what questions you have that we have not been able to answer. Certainly let those give us those in the chat message so that that will help us build out that question and answer document for you along with any additional trainings.

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Yearwood, Shannon

So with that, I am so pleased to be joined by our school nutrition team. I have Susan Alston, TeriDandeneau and Formula Brown is here somewhere, but she'll be popping up on camera soon. This is I like to refer to them as Team Awesome and that is because they are. We are so thrilled to be able to present this opportunity. We are the first state in the nation who has been able to secure funding through the American Rescue Plan Act for the purpose.

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Yearwood, Shannon

Of transitioning into next school year. And so we're gonna get right into this and dig into how this is gonna go. So we're gonna go off camera. I'm a little bit new to presenting our information in this way. So Please be patient as we navigate some of the technology in front of us.

0:2:26.330 --> 0:2:29.370

Yearwood, Shannon

All right, so team, can you see the first slide?

0:2:30.420 --> 0:2:31.450

Yearwood, Shannon

Great. Thank you.

0:2:32.180 --> 0:2:44.650

Yearwood, Shannon

All right. So we're gonna go off camera when we present so that we are just staring at ourselves and

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we present and then we can all concentrate on these slides. So thanks again for joining us. We have an information-packed session ready ahead.

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Yearwood, Shannon

It's a little bit of background is that we.

0:2:51.180 --> 0:3:10.540

Yearwood, Shannon

And we were able to secure this funding as I mentioned through the American Rescue Plan Act funds we had projected that it would take around 53 to 57 million to continue to provide meals at no cost to all school children in Connecticut as we've been able to do in the last two and a half years.

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Yearwood, Shannon

Unfortunately, we are not able to see. We weren't able to secure as much as we needed, but we are absolutely thrilled and just really want to thank our Governor, our Secretaries at the Office of Personnel Management, our Commissioner at the Department of Education and a lot of folks came together to make this come true. But it does add some added complexities so we can't run this the same way we would in a very seamless way to continue to just have you.

0:3:41.870 --> 0:3:45.30

Yearwood, Shannon

Submit claims and be able to get reimbursed for those meals.

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Yearwood, Shannon

So because the ARPA funds, I'm just gonna refer to them as that were designated for this purpose under the Free school Meals for Children Grant, we really had to come up with a way to make sure that you as a school food authority knew how much to look, how much you were looking at in terms of a state share for those funds, and how long do you think for your own participation and student enrollment that that will last through the year. So we're gonna get really into that nitty gritty here.

0:4:13.350 --> 0:4:43.670

Yearwood, Shannon

But the intent of ARPA funds and the intent of this appropriation is for these funds to assist households through school food authorities continued provision of school meals at no cost for as long as possible, and the school year 2223. As you transition back to the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. So we know that starting up the year has with going straight back to traditional operations and traditional ways of collecting income.

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Yearwood, Shannon

Eligibility applications will take a little bit of time to really teach your households. Remind them some have never done this before and some of them just it's been so long that they really need a little bit more help and assistance. So this that's really what the intent of these funds are for.

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Yearwood, Shannon

So we are calling them the School Meals Assistance Revenue for Transition or SMART funds and you receive the operational memorandum or you wouldn't be joining us today.

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Yearwood, Shannon

So the purpose as I mentioned is really ARPA funds. You can use those to provide household food assistance. So This is why we are really we really had to think through how are we going to make sure that we are maintaining the integrity of the intent of these programs and why this funding was allocated to the Department of Education for this purpose. And so we really had to look at how do we help students who have been experiencing.

0:5:42.860 --> 0:6:12.310

Yearwood, Shannon

What meals at no cost to them and very unlikely to have submitted those pre reduced application forms. We know that that's been a really big challenge for folks throughout this pandemic and it's to really make sure that they don't just fall off a cliff as all of this changes back to having to charge based off of the household income. So again, it's just to buy us a little bit of time and to make sure that those households don't have such an abrupt transition and that they can really plan and budget for that accordingly.

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Yearwood, Shannon

So what we're what this will do is it required, we do require that those school food authorities that do participate in this offer their meals, their breakfast and or lunch meals at no cost to all students. And so breakfast is not a requirement. You know, it's not like community eligibility provision where you have to serve both. But if you are participating in school breakfast, then we would then the requirement is that you serve both the meals, the school breakfast and the school lunch at no cost. And we're gonna go into how we've helped to offset that with additional funding.

0:6:48.600 --> 0:7:4.450

Yearwood, Shannon

So with these funds will do is reimburse school food authorities the difference between the federal reimbursement rate for free meals and the federal reimbursement rate for reduced price meals and also the federal reimbursement rate for free meals and the difference between that and the paid meals.

0:7:7.450 --> 0:7:14.300

Yearwood, Shannon

So Fionnuala are not sorry. Just kidding. Teri, would you like to come and talk with us about who might be eligible for these SMART funds?

0:7:15.210 --> 0:7:47.780

Dandeneau, Therese

Sure. I would love to. Hi everyone. It's good to see so many people that are watching this webinar. It's awesome. So I just wanted to go over who is eligible. There's just a few slides on this and school

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food authorities that are in good standing. And if you're not in good standing, you will know are eligible to receive smart funds if they participated in a seamless summer option of the National School Lunch Program, the school year 2122, including all sites that were operating under interschool agreements.

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Dandeneau, Therese

And also uh SFA that are participating in the National School Lunch PROGRAM and or School Breakfast Program during this school year 2223.

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Dandeneau, Therese

And those eligible school food authorities include public schools, private schools, endowed academies and residential child care institutions, with day students. Most residential child care institutions don't have day students, but if you do, you're claiming them. You could be eligible.

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Dandeneau, Therese

So who is not eligible, SFAs, that are not eligible to receive SMART funds, are sites that are participating in the Community Eligibility Provision for school year 2223. New sponsors of the National School Lunch Program this school year, school food authorities that operated the National School Lunch Program, not the Seamless Summer Option in school year 2122 and school food authorities that operated under their own state agency agreement prior to March of 2020 if not operated under their own agreement.

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Dandeneau, Therese

During the public health emergency, so if you are a school that a CEP school or you're a district with all of your schools implementing CEP or you're a residential childcare institution that does not have day students, you do not have to complete and submit the attestation statement for smart funds because you're not eligible. And now I'm going to turn it over to Susan Alston.

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Alston, Susan

Thanks, Teri. So what is the process for requesting funds? You're in luck because the CSDE requested these funds on behalf of all SFAs and SFAs, do not have to request payment or recount or calculate the reimbursement. We tried to make this as simple as we could.

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Alston, Susan

So let's talk about the funding formula. We determine the amount of funding per eligible SFAs using a predetermined formula. Each allocation includes \$3000 per approved site that operated the breakfast under the Seamless Summer Option in school year 2122 and a proportional amount of funding calculated using the total school year 2018. Nineteen reduced-price and paid lunch counts. School year 18-19 was the last full year of normal operations.

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Alston, Susan

The state of Connecticut awarded thirty million to the CSDE and our preliminary calculations allocated these funds to 124 eligible SFAs. 48 SFAs were not eligible for distributions. Allocation amounts range from \$2400 to almost \$1.2 million in funding to the eligible SFA.

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Alston, Susan

If you haven't looked at it already, I would advise you to check out attachment two of the SMART SMART funds packet that we sent out.

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Alston, Susan

Umm on when Tuesday Wednesday, which includes the list of all the eligible SFAs, along with their preliminary SMART funds allocation.

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Alston, Susan

So how will SFAs receive their SMART fund payments? SFA's allocations will be loaded into the Child Nutrition program online application and claiming systems. New distribution of funds module as a starting balance. This will be a new module that will be in the online system and we will send out more information about it once it has gone live and our system each month, SFAs will place their monthly claims for reimbursement like they normally would and they will be processed for by us for payment.

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Alston, Susan

One that is, once that is completed, a report of the number of reduced and paid meals claimed and eligibles for smart funds will be generated to determine each SFA's monthly reimbursement.

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Alston, Susan

SMART funds will be paid, usually using the same process used to pay your monthly claims for reimbursement. Once we generate those payments, the amount will be deducted from your SMART fund balance and the distribution of funds module. You will have a real time look at your balance so it will be more important this year than ever to make sure you have your claims in by the 15th of each month and according with our monthly claiming schedule for meal reimbursement.

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Alston, Susan

To help you get a clearer picture of how this is going to work, I'm going to take you through the example that we listed in the operational memorandum. So ABC School District is a sponsor of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. They are in good standing with the CSDE and they have six sites. All six sites will be operating the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program and school year 2223. All six of those sites operated under the Seamless summer option of the National School Lunch Program in school year.

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Alston, Susan

2122 all sites have lunch counts from school year 2018. Nineteen of their six participating sites, three participate in the Community Eligibility Provision and are not eligible for SMART funds.

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Alston, Susan

Based on our funding formula, the ABC School District will be allocated 100 and \$39,000 in SMART funds. They will get \$3000.00 for each of their three.

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Alston, Susan

Breakfast sites totaling \$9000 and they will also get \$130,000 based on their reduced and paid meal reimbursement from school year 2018. Nineteen at those three eligible sites.

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Alston, Susan

Now that they have their allocation, how are these monthly SMART fund calculations going to be figured out? The district places their claim for September and it is processed by the CSDE. The district claimed 2750.

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Alston, Susan

Free Meals 800 reduced and 6500 paid lunch meals and looking at the chart, the number of meals claimed is what will be used to calculate the the SMART funds reimbursement.

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Alston, Susan

Using the school year 22-23 federal reimbursement rate, the district will receive a thank you. Shannon will receive \$0.00 for free meals claimed because they are already receiving the maximum federal reimbursement for those meals. They will receive \$0.40 for each reduced meal and \$3.56 for each paid meal. This is in addition to what you are already receiving in your regular monthly claim for reimbursement. ABC District will receive \$23,460.00 in SMART funds.

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Alston, Susan

And reimbursement for lunch.

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Alston, Susan

So breakfast will work the same way. \$0.00 will be reduced for free mails, \$0.30 for reduced and \$1.76 for all paid meals. The district will receive \$653.50 in smart funds reimbursement for breakfast.

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Alston, Susan

The total for breakfast and lunch reimbursement, the ABC District will receive will be \$24,113.50. This amount will be deducted from their starting balance and the distribution of funds module and

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they will see that they will have 100 and \$14,886.50 to continue offering meals at no cost to household.

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Alston, Susan

And looking at their reimbursement for the month and the remaining balance, ABC district appears to be on trend to provide meals at no cost to all students for about five more months or until February 2022. This may vary based on the number of operating days schools have each month taking into consideration vacations, holidays and other things that may impact the how funding, how long the funding will last.

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Alston, Susan

To provide a bit more payment information, SFAs will receive reimbursement payments monthly dependent on a timely submission of the monthly claim for reimbursement.

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Alston, Susan

Payments will be sent using the same process for for the federal claims for reimbursement, the catalog of federal domestic assistance, or the CFDA. A number for these funds is 21.027.

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Alston, Susan

The CSDE coding description for these funds, or how you may receive it on your invoice when you're paid, will be free meals for students and that we're using this as this is how it was here marked by the state and Public Act 222-118. The smart funds will be treated as fiscal year 2023 funds for all of your accounting purposes, and now I will turn it over to Fionnuala.

0:16:37.880 --> 0:16:38.670

Brown, Fionnuala

OK.

0:16:39.350 --> 0:16:40.200

Brown, Fionnuala

Thanks Susan.

0:16:42.920 --> 0:17:1.290

Brown, Fionnuala

So what child nutrition programs can the SMART funds be used for? SMART funds can only be used to support serving National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program meals at no cost to students. SMART funds cannot be used at schools that do not participate in the National School Lunch Program.

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Brown, Fionnuala

Attachment one, which was sent out with the operational memorandum 14-22.

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Brown, Fionnuala

Has the questions and answers for the school meals assistant revenue for transition funds for school year 2223? That Q&A has 37 questions and answers covering general questions, use of funds claiming free and reduced price eligibility, and miscellaneous. We encourage you to review the Q&A prior to sending questions to the Department of Education.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SMART funds cannot be used in support of all carte items or meals. Seamless summer option of the National School Lunch program. The Afterschool Snack Program, Special Milk Program, Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The Summer Food Service Program, Child and Adult Care Food Program, or student debt.

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Brown, Fionnuala

Again, for further information about the funds, please see the Q&A.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SFAs must submit the attestation statement which was attachment three in the e-mail that went out with Operation Operational Memorandum 14 Dash 22 to accept the SMART funds to accept the funds. SFAs much check the accept box and all 14 yes criterion on the check boxes.

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Brown, Fionnuala

And no answer to any criterion will disqualify the SFA from receipt of the SMART funds.

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Brown, Fionnuala

Next slide, please. In addition to attestation, attesting to all the criterion, SFAs must attach a list of all sites that will be participating in the School Breakfast Program for the entirety of school year 2223. This list can be sent in in a Word document or Excel spreadsheet.

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Brown, Fionnuala

It must be sent in with the attestation statement. Any attestation statements that do not include the list of breakfast programs will be incomplete and must have that attached.

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Brown, Fionnuala

This is necessary to ensure the allocation the preliminary allocation is accurate.

0:19:30.130 --> 0:19:31.90

Brown, Fionnuala

XI, please.

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0:19:33.240 --> 0:19:34.90

Brown, Fionnuala

Lastly.

0:19:34.960 --> 0:19:42.350

Brown, Fionnuala

To accept the funds and authorized, signer must certify the attestation is true and correct and sign the form.

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Brown, Fionnuala

An authorized signer is 2 authorized signers or designated for each sponsor and those are the designated individuals to enter into agreement with the Department of Education and certified claims. This is not the food service director and any submitted attestation with blank or an incorrect authorized representative will be returned.

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Brown, Fionnuala

Next slide, please. Now we're going to review the items listed on the attestation statement in which the SFA agrees to do in order to accept the SMART funds.

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Brown, Fionnuala

So SFA is accepting SMART funds, will offer no cost, reimbursable lunch and or breakfast meals to all students at all eligible sites participating under their agreement for the duration of the availability of the SMART funds and notify parents, guardians and students. Additionally, they will not charge students for reimbursable lunch and or breakfast meals regardless of the their eligibility status.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SFAs will utilize the direct certification list to identify individual student eligibility. They will collect free and reduced meal applications to determine individual student eligibility.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SFAs will collect proper point-of-service counts based on individual student eligibility and will claim reimbursable meals by those individual student eligibility statuses.

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Brown, Fionnuala

They will agree to submit monthly claims for reimbursement to the Department of Education in accordance with current schedule for submitting online reimbursement claim data.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SFAs will use SMART funds only to support providing National School lunch Program, School Breakfast Program meals at no cost to students under their sponsorship.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SFAs accepting SMART funds must attest to the following.

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Brown, Fionnuala

They will notify the Department of Education at least 30 days prior to the conclusion of offering meals at no cost and will utilize the remaining funds in accordance with seven CFR 210 to 20.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SFAs will notify parents and guardians of students eligible for reduced and paid meals at least 30 days prior to the conclusion of our offering. Meals at no cost.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SFAs will comply with all applicable federal procurement and financial management requirements. They will comply with all record keeping and review requirements, including maintaining documentation, demonstrating appropriate use of SMART funds.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SFAs SMART funds must also recognize that funds cannot be used for the following to indirectly or directly offset a reduction of net tax revenue to make a deposit to a pension fund for debt service or replenishing financial reserves to satisfy any obligations of settlements and judgment.

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Brown, Fionnuala

For a project that conflicts with conflicts with or converses with purpose of, the American Rescue Plan Act statute in violation of the award terms and conditions or conflicts of interest requirement under the uniform guidance to 7 CFR 200.

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Brown, Fionnuala

And that concludes the attestation. Now how to SFAs decline SMART funds so decline SMART funds?

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Brown, Fionnuala

You still need to submit the attestation statement and it needs to be signed by an authorized representative is if an SFA declines their allocation. They're SMART funds will be available for reallocation by the Department of Education.

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Brown, Fionnuala

OK, that's enough. With the attestation statement. Next I'm going to cover some miscellaneous items operating fund balance. SFAs are eligible for SMART funds if they're net cash resource exceeds a three month operating balance.

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Brown, Fionnuala

SFAs that exceed the three months operating balance must submit a plan for reducing excess operating balance to the Department of Education, this plan is going to be submitted with your online application as part of your financial report in the fall of 2022.

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Brown, Fionnuala

Next slide, please. These attestations statements are due to the Department of Education, August 19th, 2022 and they need to be emailed to the designated e-mail address. Do not submit to your county consultant.

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Brown, Fionnuala

At this time, all reporting requirements at the at the state agency level.

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Brown, Fionnuala

And smart funds will be monitored to ensure compliance with the smartphone requirements. This will happen during administrative review during your school nutrition programs. Additionally, SMART funds may be subject to future external audit activity under the standard auditing practices.

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Brown, Fionnuala

And here we have the resources we have described throughout this webinar and we encourage you to review all of these resources that were sent out.

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Brown, Fionnuala

And lastly, we have a list of the counties and the county consultants where you can direct your questions to after. You have read that.

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Brown, Fionnuala

37 question and answer attachment and the operational memorandum. If you have additional items, please feel to feel free to reach out.

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Brown, Fionnuala

And that concludes the webinar.

0:25:47.810 --> 0:25:48.440

Brown, Fionnuala

Shannon.

0:25:49.840 --> 0:26:0.540

Yearwood, Shannon

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Thank you. I am here but my camera is not cooperating with me. Thank you so much, Fionnuala and Susan and Teri, just a few things to emphasize for everybody, we really.

0:26:1.480 --> 0:26:31.710

Yearwood, Shannon

We really encourage you to do as much as you can to collect those free and reduced-price applications. The more applications you are able to approve for free or reduced-price meals, the more federal reimbursements you'll be able to receive and that will make your state share of the of the school meals assistance revenue for the transition go further, so please do take that into account. We also know that each month, as Susan had mentioned.

0:26:31.800 --> 0:26:40.590

Yearwood, Shannon

There is fluctuation in participation. We encourage you to forecast very closely and carefully based off of your last year of.

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Yearwood, Shannon

To put more typical meal service. So that's part of the. That is the reason that we looked at the school year 1819. So certainly that is for your own district. I'm going to be a very important data source for you. Another thing that I just want to emphasize is for districts that are 100% all of their schools under their sponsor agreement are participating in the Community Eligibility Provision. You do not need to submit an attestation statement. Everybody else will need to submit an attestation statement.

0:27:12.510 --> 0:27:36.980

Yearwood, Shannon

Either actively opting in or opting out of the SMART funds, declining that opportunity as soon as we receive those, those those declining of the SMART funds, we will take an assessment and redistribute those funds to districts that are participating. So the preliminary allocation document that you received is the minimum amount that your.

0:27:37.90 --> 0:27:55.830

Yearwood, Shannon

That your district, your school food authority, is eligible for for this purpose. So the funds, if you stay opting into it, could only go up. Not that one from that base allocation. And we will certainly reissue once we have reached our deadline of August 19th.

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Yearwood, Shannon

The other thing is there will not be another opportunity because we are immediately ready.

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Yearwood, Shannon

And reallocating these funds, so definitely think through a carefully pulled together, the folks on your end that are the decision makers who really need to help you look into these budget numbers and look into your participation. So that when you opt in, you are aware of all of the conditions.

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0:28:21.640 --> 0:28:28.480

Yearwood, Shannon

And and that if you opt out, there will not be another opportunity as those funds will happen reallocated already.

0:28:29.550 --> 0:29:1.240

Yearwood, Shannon

So with that I I saw a few questions come in and I did only enable the chat for the duration of this meeting. So we will go ahead and give you 2 more minutes to get in those burning questions. Since we had a goal of only taking a half an hour of your time today and I think we have achieved that. So certainly enter those into your chat. I saw a few of you were able to answer your questions for each other, which is always a wonderful thing to see, but we will need to know what your questions are so that we can put together some comprehensive documents for you.

0:29:1.800 --> 0:29:23.650

Yearwood, Shannon

We do have resources. I saw one float across that. Will we have been waiting to be able to launch this to make all of the information available to you that you need to notify your households whether you opt into the SMART funds or not? So more information on that coming soon. We definitely have both sets of materials ready to go for you.

0:29:25.340 --> 0:29:25.920

Yearwood, Shannon

Great.

0:29:27.150 --> 0:29:31.500

Yearwood, Shannon

Team, is there anything else that you that you thought of while we were going through that that you may want to mention?

0:29:34.360 --> 0:29:35.930

Yearwood, Shannon

Like, no, please don't call on us.

0:29:45.820 --> 0:29:46.190

Brown, Fionnuala

I.

0:29:46.250 --> 0:29:47.770

Yearwood, Shannon

Let us yeah, go ahead.

0:29:47.900 --> 0:30:9.380

Brown, Fionnuala

Yeah, I'm. I'm just reading some of the questions that are coming in on the chat. And again, I encourage you to go to that question and answer. We took a lot of time to develop that to to kind of cover what we thought you'd be asking about. And I do see some of the questions that are represented here might be answered in that Q&A. So please take a look at that. Yep, and that's it.

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0:30:10.760 --> 0:30:45.580

Yearwood, Shannon

Great. Thank you so much. So we will be posting this. We will let you know through the school lunch tray where to find it and we will likely make it available in several places on the website so that you don't miss it and we will be highlighting this for the next couple of weeks. This is a very tight turnarounds. We are absolutely aware of that. So we have been doing due diligence and letting everybody else who this will impact also know that this might be coming around the bend. So keeps it being those questions. You can submit questions to your county consultants, but the attestation statements need to go to the app.

0:30:45.650 --> 0:30:49.220

Yearwood, Shannon

Appropriate mailbox do not send those to the consultants or they will be incomplete.

0:30:49.760 --> 0:31:15.710

Yearwood, Shannon

And thank you so much for all you do. Thank you to my team who's absolutely extraordinary. We might have to upgrade from Team Awesome to Team Extraordinary and we will just thank you guys as you go and we're very excited to be part of this adventure with you and to do what we know will help support our kids achieve their social emotional learning and their educational achievement. Thank you so much.

SMART Funds Information Session Transcript: August 2, 2022

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1. **mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or
2. **fax:** (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
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